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THE

# OLD ENGLISH DRAMATISTS

BY

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

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## NOTE

In the spring of 1887, Mr. Lowell read, at the Lowell Institute in Boston, six lectures on the Old English Dramatists. They had been rapidly written, and in their delivery much was said extemporaneously, suggested by the passages from the plays selected for illustration of the discourse. To many of these passages there was no reference in the manuscript; they were read from the printed book. The lectures were never revised by Mr. Lowell for publication, but they contain such admirable and interesting criticism, and are in themselves such genuine pieces of good literature, that it has seemed to me that they should be given to the public.[1]

CHARLES ELIOT NORTON.

[1] Before their publication in this volume, these Lectures appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, in the numbers from June to November, 1892.

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# THE OLD ENGLISH DRAMATISTS

## I

## INTRODUCTORY

When the rule limiting speeches to an hour was adopted by Congress, which was before most of you were born, an eminent but somewhat discursive person spent more than that measure of time in convincing me that whoever really had anything to say could say it in less. I then and there acquired a conviction of this truth, which has only strengthened with years. Yet whoever undertakes to lecture must adapt his discourse to the law which requires such exercises to be precisely sixty minutes long, just as a certain standard of inches must be reached by one who would enter the army. If one has been studying all his life how to be terse, how to suggest rather than to expound, how to contract rather than to dilate, something like a strain is put upon the conscience by this necessity of giving the full measure of words, without reference to other considerations which a judicious ear may esteem of more importance. Instead of saying things compactly and pithily, so that they may be easily carried away, one is tempted into a certain generosity and circumambience of phrase, which, if not adapted

to conquer Time, may at least compel him to turn his glass and admit a drawn game. It is so much harder to fill an hour than to empty one!

These thoughts rose before me with painful vividness as I fancied myself standing here again, after an interval of thirty-two years, to address an audience at the Lowell Institute. Then I lectured, not without some favorable acceptance, on Poetry in general and what constituted it, on Imagination and Fancy, on Wit and Humor, on Metrical Romances, on Ballads, and I know not what else — on whatever I thought I had anything to say about, I suppose. Then I was at the period in life when thoughts rose in coveys, and one filled one's bag without considering too nicely whether the game had been hatched within his neighbor's fence or within his own, — a period of life when it does n't seem as if everything had been said; when a man overestimates the value of what specially interests himself, and insists with Don Quixote that all the world shall stop till the superior charms of his Dulcinea of the moment have been acknowledged; when he conceives himself a missionary, and is persuaded that he is saving his fellows from the perdition of their souls if he convert them from belief in some æsthetic heresy. That is the mood of mind in which one may read lectures with some assurance of success. I remember how I read mine over to the clock, that I might be sure I had enough, and how patiently the clock listened, and gave no opinion except as to duration, on which point it assured me that I always ran over. This is the

pleasant peril of enthusiasm, which has always something of the careless superfluity of youth. Since then, and for a period making a sixth part of my mature life, my mind has been shunted off upon the track of other duties and other interests. If I have learned something, I have also forgotten a good deal. One is apt to forget so much in the service of one's country, — even that he is an American, I have been told, though I can hardly believe it.

When I selected my topic for this new venture, I was returning to a first love. The second volume I ever printed, in 1843, I think it was, — it is now a rare book, I am not sorry to know; I have not seen it for many years, — was mainly about the Old English Dramatists, if I am not mistaken. I dare say it was crude enough, but it was spontaneous and honest. I have continued to read them ever since, with no less pleasure, if with more discrimination. But when I was confronted with the question what I could say of them that would interest any rational person, after all that had been said by Lamb, the most sympathetic of critics, by Hazlitt, one of the most penetrative, by Coleridge, the most intuitive, and by so many others, I was inclined to believe that instead of an easy subject I had chosen a subject very far from easy. But I sustained myself with the words of the great poet who so often has saved me from myself: —

> "Vagliami il lungo studio e il grande amore,
> Che m' ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume."

If I bring no other qualification, I bring at least that of hearty affection, which is the first condition of insight. I shall not scruple to repeat what may seem already too familiar, confident that these old poets will stand as much talking about as most people. At the risk of being tedious, I shall put you back to your scales as a teacher of music does his pupils. For it is the business of a lecturer to treat his audience as M. Jourdain wished to be treated in respect of the Latin language, — to take it for granted that they know, but to talk to them as if they did n't. I should have preferred to entitle my course Readings from the Old English Dramatists with illustrative comments, rather than a critical discussion of them, for there is more conviction in what is beautiful in itself than in any amount of explanation why, or exposition of how, it is beautiful. A rose has a very succinct way of explaining itself. When I find nothing profitable to say, I shall take sanctuary in my authors.

It is generally assumed that the Modern Drama in France, Spain, Italy, and England was an evolution out of the Mysteries and Moralities and Interludes which had edified and amused preceding generations of simpler taste and ruder intelligence. 'T is the old story of Thespis and his cart. Taken with due limitations, and substituting the word *stage* for *drama*, this theory of origin is satisfactory enough. The stage was there, and the desire to be amused, when the drama at last appeared to occupy the one and to satisfy the other. It seems to have

been, so far as the English Drama is concerned, a case of *post hoc*, without altogether adequate grounds for inferring a *propter hoc*. The Interludes may have served as training-schools for actors. It is certain that Richard Burbage, afterwards of Shakespeare's company, was so trained. He is the actor, you will remember, who first played the part of Hamlet, and the untimely expansion of whose person is supposed to account for the Queen's speech in the fencing scene, "He 's fat and scant of breath." I may say, in passing, that the phrase merely means "He 's out of training," as we should say now. A fat Hamlet is as inconceivable as a lean Falstaff. Shakespeare, with his usual discretion, never makes the Queen hateful, and made use of this expedient to show her solicitude for her son. Her last word, as she is dying, is his name.

To return. The Interlude may have kept alive the traditions of a stage, and may have made ready a certain number of persons to assume higher and graver parts when the opportunity should come; but the revival of learning, and the rise of cities capable of supplying a more cultivated and exacting audience, must have had a stronger and more direct influence on the growth of the Drama, as we understand the word, than any or all other influences combined. Certainly this seems to me true of the English Drama at least. The English Miracle Plays are dull beyond what is permitted even by the most hardened charity, and there is nothing dramatic in them except that they are in the form of

dialogue. The Interludes are perhaps further saddened in the reading by reminding us how much easier it was to be amused three hundred years ago than now, but their wit is the wit of the Eocene period, unhappily as long as it is broad, and their humor is horse-play. We inherited a vast accumulation of barbarism from our Teutonic ancestors. It was only on those terms, perhaps, that we could have their vigor too. The Interludes have some small value as illustrating manners and forms of speech, but the man must be born expressly for the purpose — as for some of the adventures of mediæval knight-errantry — who can read them. "Gammer Gurton's Needle" is perhaps as good as any. It was acted at Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1566, and is remarkable, as Mr. Collier pointed out, as the first existing play acted before either University. Its author was John Still, afterwards Bishop of Bath and Wells, and it is curious that when Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge he should have protested against the acting before the University of an English play so unbefitting its learning, dignity, and character. "Gammer Gurton's Needle" contains a very jolly and spirited song in praise of ale. Latin plays were acted before the Universities on great occasions, but there was nothing dramatic about them but their form. One of them by Burton, author of the "Anatomy of Melancholy," has been printed, and is not without merit. In the "Pardoner and the Frere" there is a hint at the drollery of those cross-readings with which Bonnell Thornton made our grandfathers laugh: —

"*Pard.* Pope July the Sixth hath granted fair and well —
*Fr.* That when to them God hath abundance sent —
*Pard.* And doth twelve thousand years of pardon to them send —
*Fr.* They would distribute none to the indigent —
*Pard.* That aught to this holy chapel lend."

Everything in these old farces is rudimentary. They are not merely coarse; they are vulgar.

In France it was better, but France had something which may fairly be called literature before any other country in Europe, not literature in the highest sense, of course, but something, at any rate, that may be still read with pleasure for its delicate beauty, like "Aucassin and Nicolete," or for its downright vigor, like the "Song of Roland," or for its genuine humor, like "Renard the Fox." There is even one French Miracle Play of the thirteenth century, by the trouvère Rutebeuf, based on the legend of Theophilus of Antioch, which might be said to contain the germ of Calderon's "El Magico Prodigioso," and thus, remotely, of Goethe's "Faust." Of the next century is the farce of "Patelin," which has given a new word with its several derivatives to the French language, and a proverbial phrase, *revenons à nos moutons*, that long ago domiciled itself beyond the boundaries of France. "Patelin" rises at times above the level of farce, though hardly to the region of pure comedy. I saw it acted at the Théâtre Français many years ago, with only so much modernization of language as was necessary to make it easily comprehensible, and found it far more than archæologically entertaining. Surely none of our old English Interludes

could be put upon the stage now without the gloomiest results. They were not, in my judgment, the direct, and hardly even the collateral, ancestors of our legitimate comedy. On the other hand, while the Miracle Plays left no traces of themselves in our serious drama, the play of Punch and Judy looks very like an impoverished descendant of theirs.

In Spain it was otherwise. There the old Moralities and Mysteries of the Church Festivals are renewed and perpetuated in the Autos Sacramentales of Calderon, but ensouled with the creative breath of his genius, and having a strange phantasmal reality in the ideal world of his wonder-working imagination. One of his plays, "La Devocion de la Cruz," an Auto in spirit if not in form, dramatizes, as only he could do it, the doctrine of justification by faith. In Spain, too, the comedy of the booth and the plaza is plainly the rude sketch of the higher creations of Tirso and Lope and Calderon and Rojas and Alarcon, and scores of others only less than they. The tragicomedy of "Celestina," written at the close of the fifteenth century, is the first modern piece of realism or naturalism, as it is called, with which I am acquainted. It is coarse, and most of the characters are low, but there are touches of nature in it, and the character of Celestina is brought out with singular vivacity. The word tragicomedy is many years older than this play, if play that may be called which is but a succession of dialogues, but I can think of no earlier example of its application to a production in

dramatic form than by the Bachelor Fernando de Rojas in this instance. It was made over into English, rather than translated, in 1520, — our first literary debt to Spain, I should guess. The Spanish theatre, though the influence of Seneca is apparent in the form it put on, is more sincerely a growth of the soil than any other of modern times, and it has one interesting analogy with our own in the introduction of the clown into tragedy, whether by way of foil or parody. The Spanish dramatists have been called marvels of fecundity, but the facility of their trochaic measure, in which the verses seem to go of themselves, makes their feats less wonderful. The marvel would seem to be rather that, writing so easily, they also wrote so well. Their invention is as remarkable as their abundance. Their drama and our own have affected the spirit and sometimes the substance of later literature more than any other. They have to a certain extent impregnated it. I have called the Spanish theatre a product of the soil, yet it must not be overlooked that Sophocles, Euripides, Plautus, and Terence had been translated into Spanish early in the sixteenth century, and that Lope de Rueda, its real founder, would willingly have followed classical models more closely had the public taste justified him in doing so. But fortunately the national genius triumphed over traditional criterions of art, and the Spanish theatre, asserting its own happier instincts, became and continued Spanish, with an unspeakable charm and flavor of its own.

One peculiarity of the Spanish plays makes it safe to recommend them even *virginibus puerisque*, — they are never unclean. Even Milton would have approved a censorship of the press that accomplished this. It is a remarkable example of how sharp the contradiction is between the private morals of a people and their public code of morality. Certain things may be done, but they must not seem to be done.

I have said nothing of the earlier Italian Drama because it has failed to interest me. But Italy had indirectly a potent influence, through Spenser, in suppling English verse till it could answer the higher uses of the stage. The lines — for they can hardly be called verses — of the first attempts at regular plays are as uniform, flat, and void of variety as laths cut by machinery, and show only the arithmetical ability of their fashioners to count as high as ten. A speech is a series of such laths laid parallel to each other with scrupulous exactness. But I shall have occasion to return to this topic in speaking of Marlowe.

Who, then, were the Old English Dramatists? They were a score or so of literary bohemians, for the most part, living from hand to mouth in London during the last twenty years of the sixteenth century and the first thirty years of the seventeenth, of the personal history of most of whom we fortunately know little, and who, by their good luck in being born into an unsophisticated age, have written a few things so well that they seem to have written themselves. Poor, nearly all of them,

they have left us a fine estate in the realm of Faery. Among them were three or four men of genius. A comrade of theirs by his calling, but set apart from them alike by the splendor of his endowments and the more equable balance of his temperament, was that divine apparition known to mortals as Shakespeare. The civil war put an end to their activity. The last of them, in the direct line, was James Shirley, remembered chiefly for two lines from the last stanza of a song of his in "The Contention of Ajax and Ulysses," which have become a proverb: —

> "Only the actions of the just
> Smell sweet and blossom in the dust."

It is a nobly simple piece of verse, with the slow and solemn cadence of a funeral march. The hint of it seems to have been taken from a passage in that droningly dreary book the "Mirror for Magistrates." This little poem is one of the best instances of the good fortune of the men of that age in the unconscious simplicity and gladness (I know not what else to call it) of their vocabulary. The language, so to speak, had just learned to go alone, and found a joy in its own mere motion, which it lost as it grew older, and to walk was no longer a marvel.

Nothing in the history of literature seems more startling than the sudden spring with which English poetry blossomed in the later years of Elizabeth's reign. We may account for the seemingly unheralded apparition of a single genius like Dante or Chaucer by the genius itself: for, given that,

everything else is possible. But even in such cases as these much must have gone before to make the genius available when it came. For the production of great literature there must be already a language ductile to all the varying moods of expression. There must be a certain amount of culture, or the stimulus of sympathy would be wanting. If, as Horace tells us, the heroes who lived before Agamemnon have perished for want of a poet to celebrate them, so doubtless many poets have gone dumb to their graves, or, at any rate, have uttered themselves imperfectly, for lack of a fitting vehicle or of an amiable atmosphere. Genius, to be sure, makes its own opportunity, but the circumstances must be there out of which it can be made. For instance, I cannot help feeling that Turold, or whoever was the author of the "Chanson de Roland," was endowed with a rare epical faculty, and that he would have given more emphatic proof of it had it been possible for him to clothe his thought in a form equivalent to the vigor of his conception. Perhaps with more art, he might have had less of that happy audacity of the first leap which Montaigne valued so highly, but would he not have gained could he have spoken to us in a verse as sonorous as the Greek hexameter, nay, even as sweet in its cadences, as variously voluble by its slurs and elisions, and withal as sharply edged and clean cut as the Italian pentameter? It is at least a question open to debate. Mr. Matthew Arnold taxes the "Song of Roland" with an entire want of the grand style; and this is true enough; but it

has immense stores of courage and victory in it, as Taillefer proved at the battle of Hastings, — yes, and touches of heroic pathos, too.

Many things had slowly and silently concurred to make that singular pre-eminence of the Elizabethan literature possible. First of all was the growth of a national consciousness, made aware of itself and more cumulatively operative by the existence and safer accessibility of a national capital, to serve it both as head and heart. The want of such a focus of intellectual, political, and material activity has had more to do with the backwardness and provincialism of our own literature than is generally taken into account. My friend Mr. Hosea Biglow ventured to affirm twenty odd years ago that we had at last arrived at this national consciousness through the convulsion of our civil war, — a convulsion so violent as might well convince the members that they formed part of a common body. But I make bold to doubt whether that consciousness will ever be more than fitful and imperfect, whether it will ever, except in some moment of supreme crisis, pour itself into and reënforce the individual consciousness in a way to make our literature feel itself of age and its own master, till we shall have got a common head as well as a common body. It is not the size of a city that gives it this stimulating and expanding quality, but the fact that it sums up in itself and gathers all the moral and intellectual forces of the country in a single focus. London is still the metropolis of the British as Paris of the French race. We admit this

readily enough as regards Australia or Canada, but we willingly overlook it as regards ourselves. Washington is growing more national and more habitable every year, but it will never be a capital till every kind of culture is attainable there on as good terms as elsewhere. Why not on better than elsewhere? We are rich enough. Bismarck's first care has been the Museums of Berlin. For a fiftieth part of the money Congress seems willing to waste in demoralizing the country, we might have had the Hamilton books and the far more precious Ashburnham manuscripts. Perhaps what formerly gave Boston its admitted literary supremacy was the fact that fifty years ago it was more truly a capital than any other American city. Edinburgh once held a similar position, with similar results. And yet how narrow Boston was! How scant a pasture it offered to the imagination! I have often mused on the dreary fate of the great painter who perished slowly of inanition over yonder in Cambridgeport, he who had known Coleridge and Lamb and Wordsworth, and who, if ever any,

> "With immortal wine
> Should have been bathed and swum in more heart's ease
> Than there are waters in the Sestian seas."

The pity of it! That unfinished Belshazzar of his was a bitter sarcasm on our self-conceit. Among *us*, it was unfinishable. Whatever place can draw together the greatest amount and greatest variety of intellect and character, the most abundant elements of civilization, performs the best function

of a university. London was such a centre in the days of Queen Elizabeth. And think what a school the Mermaid Tavern must have been! The verses which Beaumont addressed to Ben Jonson from the country point to this: —

> "What things have we seen
> Done at the Mermaid! heard words that have been
> So nimble and so full of subtle flame
> As if that every one from whence they came
> Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
> And had resolved to live a fool the rest
> Of his dull life; then when there hath been thrown
> Wit able enough to justify the town
> For three days past, wit that might warrant be
> For the whole city to talk foolishly
> Till that were cancelled; and, when that was gone,
> We left an air behind us which alone
> Was able to make the two next companies
> Right witty; though but downright fools, more wise."

This air, which Beaumont says they left behind them, they carried with them, too. It was the atmosphere of culture, the open air of it, which loses much of its bracing and stimulating virtue in solitude and the silent society of books. And what discussions can we not fancy there, of language, of diction, of style, of ancients and moderns, of grammar even, for our speech was still at school, and with license of vagrant truancy for the gathering of wild flowers and the finding of whole nests full of singing birds! Here was indeed a new World of Words, as Florio called his dictionary. And the face-to-face criticism, frank, friendly, and with chance of reply, how fruitful it must have been!

It was here, doubtless, that Jonson found fault with that verse of Shakespeare's, —

"Cæsar did never wrong but with just cause,"

which is no longer to be found in the play of "Julius Cæsar." Perhaps Heminge and Condell left it out, for Shakespeare could have justified himself with the hook-nosed fellow of Rome's favorite Greek quotation, that nothing justified crime but the winning or keeping of supreme power. Never could London, before or since, gather such an academy of genius. It must have been a marvellous whetstone of the wits, and spur to generous emulation.

Another great advantage which the authors of that day had was the freshness of the language, which had not then become literary, and therefore more or less commonplace. All the words they used were bright from the die, not yet worn smooth in the daily drudgery of prosaic service. I am not sure whether they were so fully conscious of this as we are, who find a surprising charm in it, and perhaps endow the poet with the witchery that really belongs to the vocables he employs. The parts of speech of these old poets are just archaic enough to please us with that familiar strangeness which makes our own tongue agreeable if spoken with a hardly perceptible foreign accent. The power of giving novelty to things outworn is, indeed, one of the prime qualities of genius, and this novelty the habitual phrase of the Elizabethans has for us without any merit of theirs. But I

think, making all due abatements, that they had the hermetic gift of buckling wings to the feet of their verse in a measure which has fallen to the share of few or no modern poets. I think some of them certainly were fully aware of the fine qualities of their mother-tongue. Chapman, in the poem "To the Reader," prefixed to his translation of the Iliad, protests against those who preferred to it the softer Romance languages: —

> "And for our tongue that still is so impaired
> By travailing linguists, I can prove it clear,
> That no tongue hath the Muses' utterance heired
> For verse and that sweet Music to the ear
> Strook out of rime, so naturally as this;
> Our monosyllables so kindly fall,
> And meet, opposed in rhyme, as they did kiss."

I think Chapman has very prettily maintained and illustrated his thesis. But, though fortunate in being able to gather their language with the dew still on it, as herbs must be gathered for use in certain incantations, we are not to suppose that our elders used it indiscriminately, or tumbled out their words as they would dice, trusting that luck or chance would send them a happy throw; that they did not select, arrange, combine, and make use of the most cunning artifices of modulation and rhythm. They debated all these questions, we may be sure, not only with a laudable desire of excellence, and with a hope to make their native tongue as fitting a vehicle for poetry and eloquence as those of their neighbors, or as those of Greece and Rome, but also with something of the eager joy of adventure and discovery. They must have

felt with Lucretius the delight of wandering over the pathless places of the Muse, and hence, perhaps, it is that their step is so elastic, and that we are never dispirited by a consciousness of any lassitude when they put forth their best pace. If they are natural, it is in great part the benefit of the age they lived in; but the winning graces, the picturesque felicities, the electric flashes, I had almost said the explosions, of their style are their own. And their diction mingles its elements so kindly and with such gracious reliefs of changing key, now dallying with the very childishness of speech like the spinsters and the knitters in the sun, and anon snatched up without effort to the rapt phrase of passion or of tragedy that flashes and reverberates!

The dullest of them, for I admit that many of them were dull as a comedy of Goethe, and dulness loses none of its disheartening properties by age, no, nor even by being embalmed in the precious gems and spices of Lamb's affectionate eulogy, — for I am persuaded that I should know a stupid mummy from a clever one before I had been in his company five minutes, — the dullest of them, I say, has his lucid intervals. There are, I grant, dreary wastes and vast solitudes in such collections as Dodsley's "Old Plays," where we slump along through the loose sand without even so much as a mirage to comfort us under the intolerable drought of our companion's discourse. Nay, even some of the dramatists who have been thought worthy of editions all to themselves, may enjoy that seclusion without fear of its being disturbed by me.

Let me mention a name or two of such as I shall not speak of in this course. Robert Greene is one of them. He has all the inadequacy of imperfectly drawn tea. I thank him, indeed, for the word "brightsome," and for two lines of Sephestia's song to her child, —

> "Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee,
> When thou art old, there 's grief enough for thee," —

which have all the innocence of the Old Age in them. Otherwise he is naught. I say this for the benefit of the young, for in my own callow days I took him seriously because the Rev. Alexander Dyce had edited him, and I endured much in trying to reconcile my instincts with my superstition. He it was that called Shakespeare "an upstart crow beautified with our feathers," as if any one could have any use for feathers from such birds as he, except to make pens of them. He was the cause of the dulness that was in other men, too, and human nature feels itself partially avenged by this stanza of an elegy upon him by one "R. B.," quoted by Mr. Dyce: —

> "Greene is the pleasing object of an eye;
> Greene pleased the eyes of all that looked upon him;
> Greene is the ground of every painter's dye;
> Greene gave the ground to all that wrote upon him;
> Nay, more, the men that so eclipsed his fame
> Purloyned his plumes; can they deny the same?"

Even the libeller of Shakespeare deserved nothing worse than this! If this is "R. B." when he was playing upon words, what must he have been when serious?

Another dramatist whom we can get on very

well without is George Peele, the friend and fellow-roisterer of Greene. He, too, defied the inspiring influence of the air he breathed almost as successfully as his friend. But he had not that genius for being dull all the time that Greene had, and illustrates what I was just saying of the manner in which the most tiresome of these men waylay us when we least expect it with some phrase or verse that shines and trembles in the memory like a star. Such are : —

> "For her I 'll build a kingly bower
> Seated in hearing of a hundred streams";

and this, of God's avenging lightning, —

> "At him the thunder shall discharge his bolt,
> And his fair spouse, with bright and fiery wings,
> Sit ever burning in his hateful bones."

He also wrote some musically simple stanzas, of which I quote the first two, the rather that Thackeray was fond of them : —

> "My golden locks Time hath to silver turned
> (O Time too swift, and swiftness never ceasing),
> My youth 'gainst age, and age at youth hath spurned,
> But spurned in vain; youth waneth by increasing.
> Beauty, strength, and youth, flowers fading been;
> Duty, faith, and love, are roots, and ever green.
>
> "My helmet now shall make an hive for bees,
> And lover's songs shall turn to holy psalms;
> A man-at-arms must now serve on his knees,
> And feed on prayers, that are old age's alms.
> But though from court to cottage I depart,
> My saint is sure of mine unspotted heart."

There is a pensiveness in this, half pleasurable, half melancholy, that has a charm of its own.

Thomas Dekker is a far more important person. Most of his works seem to have been what artists call pot-boilers, written at ruinous speed, and with the bailiff rather than the Muse at his elbow. There was a liberal background of prose in him, as in Ben Jonson, but he was a poet and no mean one, as he shows by the careless good luck of his epithets and similes. He could rise also to a grave dignity of style that is grateful to the ear, nor was he incapable of that heightened emotion which might almost pass for passion. His fancy kindles wellnigh to imagination at times, and ventures on those extravagances which entice the fancy of the reader as with the music of an invitation to the waltz. I had him in my mind when I was speaking of the *obiter dicta*, of the fine verses dropt casually by these men when you are beginning to think they have no poetry in them. Fortune tells Fortunatus, in the play of that name, that he shall have gold as countless as

> "Those gilded wantons that in swarms do run
> To warm their *slender bodies* in the sun,"

thus giving him a hint also of its ephemeral nature. Here is a verse, too, that shows a kind of bleakish sympathy of sound and sense. Long life, he tells us, —

> "Is a long journey in December gone."

It may be merely my fancy, but I seem to hear a melancholy echo in it, as of footfalls on frozen earth. Or take this for a pretty fancy: —

> "The moon hath through her bow scarce drawn to the head,
> Like to twelve silver arrows, all the months
> Since — "

when do you suppose? I give you three guesses, as the children say. Since 1600! Poor Fancy shudders at this opening of Haydn's "Dictionary of Dates" and thinks her silver arrows a little out of place, like a belated masquerader going home under the broad grin of day. But the verses themselves seem plucked from "Midsummer-Night's Dream."

This is as good an instance as may be of the want of taste, of sense of congruity, and of the delicate discrimination that makes style, which strikes and sometimes even shocks us in the Old Dramatists. This was a disadvantage of the age into which they were born, and is perhaps implied in the very advantages it gave them, and of which I have spoken. Even Shakespeare offends sometimes in this way. Good taste, if mainly a gift of nature, is also an acquisition. It was not impossible even then. Samuel Daniel had it, but the cautious propriety with which it embarrassed him has made his drama of "Cleopatra" unapproachable, in more senses than one, in its frigid regularity. His contemplative poetry, thanks to its grave sweetness of style, is among the best in our language. And Daniel wrote the following sentences, which explain better than anything I could say why his contemporaries, in spite of their manifest imperfections, pleased then and continue to please: "Suffer the world to enjoy that which it knows and what it likes, seeing whatsoever form of words doth move delight, and sway the affections of men, in what Scythian sort soever it be disposed and

uttered, that is true number, measure, eloquence, and the perfection of speech." Those men did "move delight, and sway the affections of men," in a very singular manner, gaining, on the whole, perhaps, more by their liberty than they lost by their license. But it is only genius that can safely profit by this immunity. Form, of which we hear so much, is of great value, but it is not of the highest value, except in combination with other qualities better than itself; and it is worth noting that the modern English poet who seems least to have regarded it, is also the one who has most powerfully moved, swayed, and delighted those who are wise enough to read him.

One more passage and I have done. It is from the same play of "Old Fortunatus," a favorite of mine. The Soldan of Babylon shows Fortunatus his treasury, or cabinet of bric-à-brac: —

"Behold yon tower: there stands mine armoury,
In which are corselets forged of beaten gold
To arm ten hundred thousand fighting men,
Whose glittering squadrons when the sun beholds,
They seem like to ten hundred thousand Joves,
When Jove on the proud back of thunder rides,
Trapped all in lightning-flames. There can I show thee
The ball of gold that set all Troy on fire;
There shalt thou see the scarf of Cupid's mother,
Snatcht from the soft moist ivory of her arm
To wrap about Adonis' wounded thigh;
There shalt thou see a wheel of Titan's car
Which dropt from Heaven when Phaethon fired the world.
I 'll give thee (if thou wilt) two silver doves
Composed by magic to divide the air,
Who, as they flie, shall clap their silver wings
And give strange music to the elements.

> I 'll give thee else the fan of Proserpine,
> Which, in reward for a sweet Thracian song,
> The blackbrow'd Empress threw to Orpheus,
> Being come to fetch Eurydice from hell."

This is, here and there, tremblingly near bombast, but its exuberance is cheery, and the quaintness of Proserpine's fan shows how real she was to the poet. Hers was a generous gift, considering the climate in which Dekker evidently supposed her to dwell, and speaks well for the song that could make her forget it. There is crudeness, as if the wine had been drawn before the ferment was over, but the arm of Venus is from the life, and that one verse gleams and glows among the rest like the thing it describes. The whole passage is a good example of fancy, whimsical, irresponsible. But there is more imagination and power to move the imagination in Shakespeare's "sunken wreck and sunless treasures" than all his contemporaries together, not even excepting Marlowe, could have mustered.

We lump all these poets together as dramatists because they wrote for the theatre, and yet how little they were truly dramatic seems proved by the fact that none, or next to none, of their plays have held the stage. Not one of their characters, that I can remember, has become one of the familiar figures that make up the habitual society of any cultivated memory even of the same race and tongue. Marlowe, great as he was, makes no exception. To some of them we cannot deny genius, but creative genius we must deny to all of them, and dramatic genius as well.

This last, indeed, is one of the rarest gifts bestowed on man. What is that which we call dramatic? In the abstract, it is thought or emotion in action, or on its way to become action. In the concrete, it is that which is more vivid if represented than described, and which would lose if merely narrated. Goethe, for example, had little dramatic power; though, if taking thought could have earned it, he would have had enough, for he studied the actual stage all his life. The characters in his plays seem rather to express his thoughts than their own. Yet there is one admirably dramatic scene in "Faust" which illustrates what I have been saying. I mean Margaret in the cathedral, suggested to Goethe by the temptation of Justina in Calderon's "Magico Prodigioso," but full of horror as that of seductiveness. We see and hear as we read. Her own bad conscience projected in the fiend who mutters despair into her ear, and the awful peals of the "Dies Iræ," that most terribly resonant of Latin hymns, as if blown from the very trump of doom itself, coming in at intervals to remind her that the

> "Tuba mirum spargens sonum
> Per sepulchra regionum
> Coget omnes ante thronum,"

herself among the rest, — all of this would be weaker in narration. This is real, and needs realization by the senses to be fully felt. Compare it with Dimmesdale mounting the pillory at night, in "The Scarlet Letter," to my thinking the deepest thrust of what may be called the metaphysical im-

agination since Shakespeare. There we need only a statement of the facts — pictorial statement, of course, as Hawthorne's could not fail to be — and the effect is complete. Thoroughly to understand a good play and enjoy it, even in the reading, the imagination must body forth its personages, and see them doing or suffering in the visionary theatre of the brain. There, indeed, they are best seen, and Hamlet or Lear loses that ideal quality which makes him typical and universal if he be once compressed within the limits, or associated with the lineaments, of any, even the best, actor.

It is for their poetical qualities, for their gleams of imagination, for their quaint and subtle fancies, for their tender sentiment, and for their charm of diction that these old playwrights are worth reading. They are the best comment also to convince us of the immeasurable superiority of Shakespeare. Several of them, moreover, have been very inadequately edited, or not at all, which is perhaps better; and it is no useless discipline of the wits, no unworthy exercise of the mind, to do our own editing as we go along, winning back to its cradle the right word for the changeling the printers have left in his stead, making the lame verses find their feet again, and rescuing those that have been tumbled higgledy-piggledy into a mire of prose. A strenuous study of this kind will enable us better to understand many a faulty passage in our Shakespeare, and to judge of the proposed emendations of them, or to make one to our own liking. There is no better school for learning English, and for learning

it when, in many important respects, it was at its best.

I am not sure that I shall not seem to talk to you of many things that seem trivialities if weighed in the huge business scales of life, but I am always glad to say a word in behalf of what most men consider useless, and to say it the rather because it has so few friends. I have observed, and am sorry to have observed, that English poetry, at least in its older examples, is less read now than when I was young. I do not believe this to be a healthy symptom, for poetry frequents and keeps habitable those upper chambers of the mind that open towards the sun's rising. It has seemed to me that life was running more and more into prose. Even our books for children have been growing more and more practical and realistic. The fairies are no longer permitted to print their rings on the tender sward of the child's fancy, and yet it is the child's fancy that sometimes lives obscurely on to minister unexpected solace to the lonelier and less sociable mind of the man. Our nature resents this, and seeks refuge in the holes and corners where coarser excitements may be had at dearer rates. I sometimes find myself thinking that if this hardening process should go much farther, it is before us, and not behind, that we should look for the Age of Flint.

## II

## MARLOWE

I SHALL preface what I have to say of Marlowe with a few words as to the refinement which had been going on in the language, and the greater ductility which it had been rapidly gaining, and which fitted it for the use of the remarkable group of men who made an epoch of the reign of Elizabeth. Spenser was undoubtedly the poet to whom we owe most in this respect, and the very great contrast between his "Shepherd's Calendar," published in 1579, and his later poems awakens curiosity. In his earliest work there are glimpses, indeed, of those special qualities which have won for him the name of the poet's poet, but they are rare and fugitive, and certainly never would have warranted the prediction of such poetry as was to follow. There is nothing here to indicate that a great artist in language had been born. Two causes, I suspect, were mainly effective in this transformation, I am almost tempted to say transubstantiation, of the man. The first was his practice in translation (true also of Marlowe), than which nothing gives a greater choice and mastery of one's mother-tongue, for one must pause and weigh and judge every word with the greatest nicety, and cunningly transfuse idiom into idiom. The other, and by far the more important, was his

study of the Italian poets. The "Faerie Queene" is full of loving reminiscence of them, but their happiest influence is felt in his lyrical poems. For these, I think, make it plain that Italy first taught him how much of the meaning of verse is in its music, and trained his ear to a sense of the harmony as well as the melody of which English verse was capable or might be made capable. Compare the sweetest passage in any lyric of the "Shepherd's Calendar" with the eloquent ardor of the poorest, if any be poor, in the "Epithalamion," and we find ourselves in a new world where music had just been invented. This we owe, beyond any doubt, to Spenser's study of the Italian canzone. Nay, the whole metrical movement of the "Epithalamion" recalls that of Petrarca's noble "*Spirto gentil.*" I repeat that melody and harmony were first naturalized in our language by Spenser. I love to recall these debts, for it is pleasant to be grateful even to the dead.

Other men had done their share towards what may be called the modernization of our English, and among these Sir Philip Sidney was conspicuous. He probably gave it greater ease of movement, and seems to have done for it very much what Dryden did a century later in establishing terms of easier intercourse between the language of literature and the language of cultivated society.

There had been good versifiers long before. Chaucer, for example, and even Gower, wearisome as he mainly is, made verses sometimes not only easy in movement, but in which the language seems

strangely modern. That most dolefully dreary of books, "The Mirror for Magistrates," and Sackville, more than any of its authors, did something towards restoring the dignity of verse, and helping it to recover its self-respect, while Spenser was still a youth. Tame as it is, the sunshine of that age here and there touches some verse that ripples in the sluggish current with a flicker of momentary illumination. But before Spenser, no English verse had ever soared and sung, or been filled with what Sidney calls "divine delightfulness." Sidney, it may be conjectured, did more by private criticism and argument than by example. Drayton says of him: —

> "The noble Sidney with this last arose,
> That heroë for numbers and for prose,
> That throughly paced our language as to show
> The plenteous English hand in hand might go
> With Greek and Latin, and did first reduce
> Our tongue from Lilly's writing then in use."

But even the affectations of Lilly were not without their use as helps to refinement. If, like Chaucer's frere, —

> "Somewhat he lisped, for his wantonness,"

it was through the desire

> "To make his English sweet upon his tongue."

It was the general clownishness against which he revolted, and we owe him our thanks for it. To show of what brutalities even recent writers could be capable, it will suffice to mention that Golding, in his translation of Ovid's Metamorphoses, makes a witch mutter the devil's pater-noster, and Ulysses express his fears of going "to pot." I should like

to read you a familiar sonnet of Sidney's for its sweetness: —

"Come, Sleep: O Sleep! the certain knot of peace,
The baiting-place of wit, the balm of woe,
The poor man's wealth, the prisoner's release,
The indifferent judge between the high and low;
With shield of proof, shield me from out the press
Of those fierce darts despair at me doth throw;
O make in me those civil wars to cease:
I will good tribute pay if thou do so.
Take thou of me smooth pillows, sweetest bed,
A chamber deaf to noise and blind to light,
A rosy garland, and a weary head:
And if these things, as being thine of right,
Move not thy heavy grace, thou shalt in me,
Livelier than elsewhere, Stella's image see."

Here is ease and simplicity; but in such a phrase as "baiting-place of wit" there is also a want of that perfect discretion which we demand of the language of poetry, however we may be glad to miss it in the thought or emotion which that language conveys. *Baiting-place* is no more a homespun word than the word *inn*, which adds a charm to one of the sweetest verses that Spenser ever wrote; but *baiting-place* is common, it smacks of the hostler and postilion, and commonness is a very poor relation indeed of simplicity. But doubtless one main cause of the vivacity of phrase which so charms us in our earlier writers is to be found in the fact that there were not yet two languages — that of life and that of literature. The divorce between the two took place a century and a half later, and that process of breeding in and in began which at last reduced the language of verse to a kind of idiocy.

Do not consider such discussions as these otiose or nugatory. The language we are fortunate enough to share, and which, I think, Jacob Grimm was right in pronouncing, in its admirable mixture of Saxon and Latin, its strength and sonorousness, a better literary medium than any other modern tongue — this language has not been fashioned to what it is without much experiment, much failure, and infinite expenditure of pains and thought. Genius and pedantry have each done its part towards the result which seems so easy to us, and yet was so hard to win — the one by way of example, the other by way of warning. The purity, the elegance, the decorum, the chastity of our mother-tongue are a sacred trust in our hands. I am tired of hearing the foolish talk of an American variety of it, about our privilege to make it what we will because we are in a majority. A language belongs to those who know best how to use it, how to bring out all its resources, how to make it search its coffers round for the pithy or canorous phrase that suits the need, and they who can do this have been always in a pitiful minority. Let us be thankful that we too have a right to it, and have proved our right, but let us set up no claim to vulgarize it. The English of Abraham Lincoln was so good not because he learned it in Illinois, but because he learned it of Shakespeare and Milton and the Bible, the constant companions of his leisure. And how perfect it was in its homely dignity, its quiet strength, the unerring aim with which it struck once nor needed to strike more! The language is

alive here, and will grow. Let us do all we can with it but debase it. Good taste may not be necessary to salvation or to success in life, but it is one of the most powerful factors of civilization. As a people we have a larger share of it and more widely distributed than I, at least, have found elsewhere, but as a nation we seem to lack it altogether. Our coinage is ruder than that of any country of equal pretensions, our paper money is filthily infectious, and the engraving on it, mechanically perfect as it is, makes of every bank-note a missionary of barbarism. This should make us cautious of trying our hand in the same fashion on the circulating medium of thought. But it is high time that I should remember Maître Guillaume of Patelin, and come back to my sheep.

In coming to speak of Marlowe, I cannot help fearing that I may fail a little in that equanimity which is the first condition of all helpful criticism. Generosity there should be, and enthusiasm there should be, but they should stop short of extravagance. Praise should not weaken into eulogy, nor blame fritter itself away into fault-finding. Goethe tells us that the first thing needful to the critic, as indeed it is to the wise man generally, is to see the thing as it really is ; this is the most precious result of all culture, the surest warrant of happiness, or at least of composure. But he also bids us, in judging any work, seek first to discover its beauties, and then its blemishes or defects. Now there are two poets whom I feel that I can never judge without a favorable bias. One is Spenser,

who was the first poet I ever read as a boy, not drawn to him by any enchantment of his matter or style, but simply because the first verse of his great poem was, —

"A gentle knight was pricking on the plain,"

and I followed gladly, wishful of adventure. Of course I understood nothing of the allegory, never suspected it, fortunately for me, and am surprised to think how much of the language I understood. At any rate, I grew fond of him, and whenever I see the little brown folio in which I read, my heart warms to it as to a friend of my childhood. With Marlowe it was otherwise. With him I grew acquainted during the most impressible and receptive period of my youth. He was the first man of genius I had ever really known, and he naturally bewitched me. What cared I that they said he was a deboshed fellow? nay, an atheist? To me he was the voice of one singing in the desert, of one who had found the water of life for which I was panting, and was at rest under the palms. How can he ever become to me as other poets are? But I shall try to be lenient in my admiration.

Christopher Marlowe, the son of a shoemaker, was born at Canterbury, in February, 1563, was matriculated at Benet College, Cambridge, in 1580, received his degree of bachelor there in 1583 and of master in 1587. He came early to London, and was already known as a dramatist before the end of his twenty-fourth year. There is some reason for thinking that he was at one time an actor. He was

killed in a tavern brawl, by a man named Archer, in 1593, at the age of thirty. He was taxed with atheism, but on inadequate grounds, as it appears to me. That he was said to have written a tract against the Trinity, for which a license to print was refused on the ground of blasphemy, might easily have led to the greater charge. That he had some opinions of a kind unusual then may be inferred, perhaps, from a passage in his "Faust." Faust asks Mephistopheles how, being damned, he is out of hell. And Mephistopheles answers, "Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it." And a little farther on he explains himself thus: —

> "Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
> In one self place; for where we are is hell,
> And where hell is there must we ever be;
> And, to conclude, when all the earth dissolves,
> And every creature shall be purified,
> All places shall be hell that are not heaven."

Milton remembered the first passage I have quoted, and puts nearly the same words into the mouth of his Lucifer. If Marlowe was a liberal thinker, it is not strange that in that intolerant age he should have incurred the stigma of general unbelief. Men are apt to blacken opinions which are distasteful to them, and along with them the character of him who holds them.

This at least may be said of him without risk of violating the rule of *ne quid nimis*, that he is one of the most masculine and fecundating natures in the long line of British poets. Perhaps his energy was even in excess. There is in him an Oriental

lavishness. He will impoverish a province for a simile, and pour the revenues of a kingdom into the lap of a description. In that delightful story in the book of Esdras, King Darius, who has just dismissed all his captains and governors of cities and satraps, after a royal feast, sends couriers galloping after them to order them all back again, because he has found a riddle under his pillow, and wishes their aid in solving it. Marlowe in like manner calls in help from every the remotest corner of earth and heaven for what seems to us as trivial an occasion. I will not say that he is bombastic, but he constantly pushes grandiosity to the verge of bombast. His contemporaries thought he passed it in his "Tamburlaine." His imagination flames and flares, consuming what it should caress, as Jupiter did Semele. That exquisite phrase of Hamlet, "the modesty of nature," would never have occurred to him. Yet in the midst of the hurly-burly there will fall a sudden hush, and we come upon passages calm and pellucid as mountain tarns filled to the brim with the purest distillations of heaven. And, again, there are single verses that open silently as roses, and surprise us with that seemingly accidental perfection, which there is no use in talking about because itself says all that is to be said and more.

There is a passage in "Tamburlaine" which I remember reading in the first course of lectures I ever delivered, thirty-four years ago, as a poet's feeling of the inadequacy of the word to the idea: —

> "If all the pens that ever poets held
> Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,

And every sweetness that inspired their hearts,
Their minds, and muses on admired themes;
If all the heavenly quintessence they still
From their immortal flowers of poesy,
Wherein, as in a mirror, we perceive
The highest reaches of a human wit; —
If these had made one poem's period,
And all combined in beauty's worthiness,
Yet should there hover in their restless heads
One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,
Which into words no virtue can digest."

Marlowe made snatches at this forbidden fruit with vigorous leaps, and not without bringing away a prize now and then such as only the fewest have been able to reach. Of fine single verses I give a few as instances of this: —

"Sometimes a lovely boy in Dian's shape,
*With hair that gilds the water as it glides*,
Shall bathe him in a spring."

Here is a couplet notable for dignity of poise describing Tamburlaine: —

"Of stature tall and straightly fashionèd,
Like his desire, lift upward and divine."

"For every street like to a firmament
Glistered with breathing stars."

"Unwedded maids
Shadowing more beauty in their airy brows
Than have the white breasts of the queen of Love."

This from "Tamburlaine" is particularly characteristic: —

"Nature
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds.
Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous architecture of the world,
And measure every wandering planet's course,

> Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
> And always moving as the restless spheres,
> Will us to wear ourselves and never rest
> Until we reach the ripest fruit of all."

One of these verses reminds us of that exquisite one of Shakespeare where he says that Love is

> "Still climbing trees in the Hesperides."

But Shakespeare puts a complexity of meaning into his chance sayings, and lures the fancy to excursions of which Marlowe never dreamt.

But, alas, a voice will not illustrate like a stereopticon, and this tearing away of fragments that seem to bleed with the avulsion is like breaking off a finger from a statue as a specimen.

The impression he made upon the men of his time was uniform; it was that of something new and strange; it was that of genius, in short. Drayton says of him, kindling to an unwonted warmth, as if he loosened himself for a moment from the choking coils of his Polyolbion for a larger breath: —

> "Next Marlowe bathèd in the Thespian springs
> Had in him those brave translunary things
> That the first poets had; his raptures were
> All air and fire, which made his verses clear;
> For that fine madness still he did retain
> Which rightly should possess a poet's brain."

And Chapman, taking up and continuing Marlowe's half-told story of Hero and Leander, breaks forth suddenly into this enthusiasm of invocation: —

> "Then, ho! most strangely intellectual fire
> That, proper to my soul, hast power to inspire

> Her burning faculties, and with the wings
> Of thy unspherèd flame visit'st the springs
> Of spirits immortal, now (as swift as Time
> Doth follow motion) find the eternal clime
> Of his free soul whose living subject stood
> Up to the chin in the Pierian flood."

Surely Chapman would have sent his soul on no such errand had he believed that the soul of Marlowe was in torment, as his accusers did not scruple to say that it was, sent thither by the manifestly Divine judgment of his violent death.

Yes, Drayton was right in classing him with "the first poets," for he was indeed such, and so continues, — that is, he was that most indefinable thing, an original man, and therefore as fresh and contemporaneous to-day as he was three hundred years ago. Most of us are more or less hampered by our own individuality, nor can shake ourselves free of that chrysalis of consciousness and give our "souls a loose," as Dryden calls it in his vigorous way. And yet it seems to me that there is something even finer than that fine madness, and I think I see it in the imperturbable sanity of Shakespeare, which made him so much an artist that his new work still bettered his old. I think I see it even in the almost irritating calm of Goethe, which, if it did not quite make him an artist, enabled him to see what an artist should be, and to come as near to being one as his nature allowed. Marlowe was certainly not an artist in the larger sense, but he was cunning in words and periods and the musical modulation of them. And even this is a very rare gift. But his mind could never submit itself to a

controlling purpose, and renounce all other things for the sake of that. His plays, with the single exception of "Edward II.," have no organic unity, and such unity as is here is more apparent than real. Passages in them stir us deeply and thrill us to the marrow, but each play as a whole is ineffectual. Even his "Edward II." is regular only to the eye by a more orderly arrangement of scenes and acts, and Marlowe evidently felt the drag of this restraint, for we miss the uncontrollable energy, the eruptive fire, and the feeling that he was happy in his work. Yet Lamb was hardly extravagant in saying that "the death scene of Marlowe's king moves pity and terror beyond any scene, ancient or modern, with which I am acquainted." His tragedy of "Dido, Queen of Carthage," is also regularly plotted out, and is also somewhat tedious. Yet there are many touches that betray his burning hand. There is one passage illustrating that luxury of description into which Marlowe is always glad to escape from the business in hand. Dido tells Æneas: —

> "Æneas, I 'll repair thy Trojan ships
> Conditionally that thou wilt stay with me,
> And let Achates sail to Italy;
> I 'll give thee tackling made of rivelled gold,
> Wound on the barks of odoriferous trees;
> Oars of massy ivory, full of holes
> Through which the water shall delight to play;
> Thy anchors shall be hewed from crystal rocks
> Which, if thou lose, shall shine above the waves;
> The masts whereon thy swelling sails shall hang
> Hollow pyramides of silver plate;
> The sails of folded lawn, where shall be wrought

The wars of Troy, but not Troy's overthrow;
For ballast, empty Dido's treasury;
Take what ye will, but leave Æneas here.
Achates, thou shalt be so seemly clad
As sea-born nymphs shall swarm about thy ships
And wanton mermaids court thee with sweet songs,
Flinging in favors of more sovereign worth
Than Thetis hangs about Apollo's neck,
So that Æneas may but stay with me."

But far finer than this, in the same costly way, is the speech of Barabas in "The Jew of Malta," ending with a line that has incorporated itself in the language with the familiarity of a proverb: —

"Give me the merchants of the Indian mines
That trade in metal of the purest mould;
The wealthy Moor that in the Eastern rocks
Without control can pick his riches up,
And in his house heap pearl like pebble-stones,
Receive them free, and sell them by the weight;
Bags of fiery opals, sapphires, amethysts,
Jacynths, hard topaz, grass-green emeralds,
Beauteous rubies, sparkling diamonds,
And seld-seen costly stones of so great price
As one of them, indifferently rated,
. . . . . .
May serve in peril of calamity
To ransom great kings from captivity.
This is the ware wherein consists my wealth:
. . . . . .
Infinite riches in a little room."

This is the very poetry of avarice.

Let us now look a little more closely at Marlowe as a dramatist. Here also he has an importance less for what he accomplished than for what he suggested to others. Not only do I think that Shakespeare's verse caught some hints from his,

but there are certain descriptive passages and similes of the greater poet which, whenever I read them, instantly bring Marlowe to my mind. This is an impression I might find it hard to convey to another, or even to make definite to myself; but it is an old one, and constantly repeats itself, so that I put some confidence in it. Marlowe's "Edward II." certainly served Shakespeare as a model for his earlier historical plays. Of course he surpassed his model, but Marlowe might have said of him as Oderisi, with pathetic modesty, said to Dante of his rival and surpasser, Franco of Bologna, "The praise is now all his, yet mine in part." But it is always thus. The path-finder is forgotten when the track is once blazed out. It was in Shakespeare's "Richard II." that Lamb detected the influence of Marlowe, saying that "the reluctant pangs of abdicating royalty in Edward furnished hints which Shakespeare has scarce improved upon in Richard." In the parallel scenes of both plays the sentiment is rather elegiac than dramatic, but there is a deeper pathos, I think, in Richard, and his grief rises at times to a passion which is wholly wanting in Edward. Let me read Marlowe's abdication scene. The irresolute nature of the king is finely indicated. The Bishop of Winchester has come to demand the crown; Edward takes it off, and says: —

> "Here, take my crown; the life of Edward too:
> Two kings of England cannot reign at once.
> But stay awhile: let me be king till night,
> That I may gaze upon this glittering crown;
> So shall my eyes receive their last content,

My head the latest honor due to it,
And jointly both yield up their wishèd right.
Continue ever, thou celestial sun;
Let never silent night possess this clime;
Stand still, you watches of the element;
All times and seasons, rest you at a stay —
That Edward may be still fair England's king!
But day's bright beam doth vanish fast away,
And needs I must resign my wishèd crown.
Inhuman creatures, nursed with tiger's milk,
Why gape you for your sovereign's overthrow? —
My diadem, I mean, and guiltless life.
See, monsters, see, I 'll wear my crown again.
What, fear you not the fury of your king?
. . . . . .
I 'll not resign, but, whilst I live, be king!"

Then, after a short further parley: —

"Here, reeeive my crown.
Receive it? No; these innocent hands of mine
Shall not be guilty of so foul a crime:
He of you all that most desires my blood,
And will be called the murderer of a king,
Take it. What, are you moved? Pity you me?
Then send for unrelenting Mortimer,
And Isabel, whose eyes, being turned to steel,
Will sooner sparkle fire than shed a tear.
Yet stay, for rather than I 'll look on them,
Here, here! — Now, sweet God of Heaven,
Make me despise this transitory pomp,
And sit for aye enthronizèd in Heaven!
Come, Death, and with thy fingers close my eyes,
Or, if I live, let me forget myself."

Surely one might fancy that to be from the prentice hand of Shakespeare. It is no small distinction that this can be said of Marlowe, for it can be said of no other. What follows is still finer. The ruffian who is to murder Edward, in order to

evade his distrust, pretends to weep. The king exclaims: —

> "Weep'st thou already? List awhile to me,
> And then thy heart, were it as Gurney's is,
> Or as Matrevis', hewn from the Caucasus,
> Yet will it melt ere I have done my tale.
> This dungeon where they keep me is the sink
> Wherein the filth of all the castle falls,
> And there in mire and puddle have I stood
> This ten days' space; and, lest that I should sleep,
> One plays continually upon a drum;
> They give me bread and water, being a king;
> So that, for want of sleep and sustenance,
> My mind 's distempered and my body numbed,
> And whether I have limbs or no I know not.
> O, would my blood dropt out from every vein,
> As doth this water from my tattered robes!
> Tell Isabel the queen I looked not thus,
> When, for her sake, I ran at tilt in France,
> And there unhorsed the Duke of Clerëmont."

This is even more in Shakespeare's early manner than the other, and it is not ungrateful to our feeling of his immeasurable supremacy to think that even he had been helped in his schooling. There is a truly royal pathos in "They give me bread and water"; and "Tell Isabel the queen," instead of "Isabel my queen," is the most vividly dramatic touch that I remember anywhere in Marlowe. And that vision of the brilliant tournament, not more natural than it is artistic, how does it not deepen by contrast the gloom of all that went before! But you will observe that the verse is rather epic than dramatic. I mean by this that its every pause and every movement are regularly cadenced. There is a kingly composure in it, perhaps, but were the

passage not so finely pathetic as it is, or the diction less naturally simple, it would seem stiff. Nothing is more peculiarly characteristic of the mature Shakespeare than the way in which his verses curve and wind themselves with the fluctuating emotion or passion of the speaker and echo his mood. Let me illustrate this by a speech of Imogen when Pisanio gives her a letter from her husband bidding her meet him at Milford-Haven. The words seem to waver to and fro, or huddle together before the hurrying thought, like sheep when the collie chases them.

> "O, for a horse with wings! — Hear'st thou, Pisanio?
> He is at Milford-Haven: read, and tell me
> How far 't is thither. If one of mean affairs
> May plod it in a week, why may not I
> Glide thither in a day? — Then, true Pisanio —
> Who long'st like me to see thy lord; who long'st
> O, let me 'bate — but not like me — yet long'st —
> But in a fainter kind: — O, not like me;
> For mine 's beyond beyond: say, and speak thick, —
> Love's counsellor should fill the bores of hearing,
> To the smothering of the sense, — how far it is
> To this same blessed Milford: and, by the way,
> Tell me how Wales was made so happy as
> To inherit such a haven: but, first of all,
> How we may steal from hence."

The whole speech is breathless with haste, and is in keeping not only with the feeling of the moment, but with what we already know of the impulsive character of Imogen. Marlowe did not, for he could not, teach Shakespeare this secret, nor has anybody else ever learned it.

There are, properly speaking, no characters in

the plays of Marlowe — but personages and interlocutors. We do not get to know them, but only to know what they do and say. The nearest approach to a character is Barabas, in "The Jew of Malta," and he is but the incarnation of the popular hatred of the Jew. There is really nothing human in him. He seems a bugaboo rather than a man. Here is his own account of himself: —

> "As for myself, I walk abroad o' nights,
> And kill sick people groaning under walls;
> Sometimes I go about and poison wells;
> And now and then, to cherish Christian thieves,
> I am content to lose some of my crowns,
> That I may, walking in my gallery,
> See 'em go pinioned by my door along;
> Being young, I studied physic, and began
> To practise first upon the Italian;
> There I enriched the priests with burials,
> And always kept the sexton's arms in ure
> With digging graves and ringing dead men's knells;
> And, after that, was I an engineer,
> And in the wars 'twixt France and Germany,
> Under pretence of helping Charles the Fifth,
> Slew friend and enemy with my stratagems.
> Then, after that, was I an usurer,
> And with extorting, cozening, forfeiting,
> And tricks belonging unto brokery,
> I filled the jails with bankrupts in a year,
> And with young orphans planted hospitals;
> And every moon made some or other mad,
> And now and then one hang himself for grief,
> Pinning upon his breast a long great scroll
> How I with interest tormented him.
> But mark how I am blest for plaguing them —
> I have as much coin as will buy the town."

Here is nothing left for sympathy. This is the mere lunacy of distempered imagination. It is

shocking, and not terrible. Shakespeare makes no such mistake with Shylock. His passions are those of a man, though of a man depraved by oppression and contumely; and he shows sentiment, as when he says of the ring that Jessica had given for a monkey: "It was my turquoise. I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor." And yet, observe the profound humor with which Shakespeare makes him think first of its dearness as a precious stone and then as a keepsake. In letting him exact his pound of flesh, he but follows the story as he found it in Giraldi Cinthio, and is careful to let us know that this Jew had good reason, or thought he had, to hate Christians. At the end, I think he meant us to pity Shylock, and we do pity him. And with what a smiling background of love and poetry does he give relief to the sombre figure of the Jew! In Marlowe's play there is no respite. And yet it comes nearer to having a connected plot, in which one event draws on another, than any other of his plays. I do not think Milman right in saying that the interest falls off after the first two acts. I find enough to carry me on to the end, where the defiant death of Barabas in a caldron of boiling oil he had arranged for another victim does something to make a man of him. But there is no controlling reason in the piece. Nothing happens because it must, but because the author wills it so. The conception of life is purely arbitrary, and as far from nature as that of an imaginative child. It is curious, however, that here, too, Marlowe should have pointed the way to Shakespeare. But there is no

resemblance between the Jew of Malta and the Jew of Venice, except that both have daughters whom they love. Nor is the analogy close even here. The love which Barabas professes for his child fails to humanize him to us, because it does not prevent him from making her the abhorrent instrument of his wanton malice in the death of her lover, and because we cannot believe him capable of loving anything but gold and vengeance. There is always something extravagant in the imagination of Marlowe, but here it is the extravagance of absurdity. Generally he gives us an impression of power, of vastness, though it be the vastness of chaos, where elemental forces hurtle blindly one against the other. But they are elemental forces, and not mere stage properties. Even Tamburlaine, if we see in him — as Marlowe, I think, meant that we should see — the embodiment of brute force, without reason and without conscience, ceases to be a blusterer, and becomes, indeed, as he asserts himself, the scourge of God. There is an exultation of strength in this play that seems to add a cubit to our stature. Marlowe had found the way that leads to style, and helped others to find it, but he never arrived there. He had not self-denial enough. He can refuse nothing to his fancy. He fails of his effect by over-emphasis, heaping upon a slender thought a burthen of expression too heavy for it to carry. But it is not with fagots, but with priceless Oriental stuffs, that he breaks their backs.

Marlowe's "Dr. Faustus" interests us in an-

other way. Here he again shows himself as a precursor. There is no attempt at profound philosophy in this play, and in the conduct of it Marlowe has followed the prose history of Dr. Faustus closely, even in its scenes of mere buffoonery. Disengaged from these, the figure of the protagonist is not without grandeur. It is not avarice or lust that tempts him at first, but power. Weary of his studies in law, medicine, and divinity, which have failed to bring him what he seeks, he turns to necromancy: —

> "These metaphysics of magicians
> And necromantic books are heavenly.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Oh, what a world of profit and delight,
> Of power, of honor, of omnipotence,
> Is promised to the studious artisan!
> All things that move between the quiet poles
> Shall be at my command. Emperors and kings
> Are but obeyèd in their several provinces,
> Nor can they raise the winds or rend the clouds;
> But his dominion that exceeds in this
> Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man;
> A sound magician is a mighty god:
> Here, Faustus, tire thy brains to gain a deity."

His good angel intervenes, but the evil spirit at the other ear tempts him with power again: —

> "Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,
> Lord and commander of these elements."

Ere long Faustus begins to think of power for baser uses: —

> "How am I glutted with conceit of this!
> Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,
> Resolve me of all ambiguities,
> Perform what desperate enterprise I will?

> I 'll have them fly to India for gold,
> Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,
> And search all corners of the new-found world
> For pleasant fruits and princely delicates;
> I 'll have them read me strange philosophy,
> And tell the secrets of all foreign kings."

And yet it is always to the pleasures of the intellect that he returns. It is when the good and evil spirits come to him for the second time that wealth is offered as a bait, and after Faustus has signed away his soul to Lucifer, he is tempted even by more sensual allurements. I may be reading into the book what is not there, but I cannot help thinking that Marlowe intended in this to typify the inevitably continuous degradation of a soul that has renounced its ideal, and the drawing on of one vice by another, for they go hand in hand like the Hours. But even in his degradation the pleasures of Faustus are mainly of the mind, or at worst of a sensuous and not sensual kind. No doubt in this Marlowe is unwittingly betraying his own tastes. Faustus is made to say: —

> "And long ere this I should have slain myself
> Had not sweet pleasure conquered deep despair.
> Have I not made blind Homer sing to me
> Of Alexander's love and Œnon's death?
> And hath not he that built the walls of Thebes
> With ravishing sound of his melodious harp
> Made music with my Mephistophilis?
> Why should I die, then? basely why despair?"

This employment of the devil in a duet seems odd. I remember no other instance of his appearing as a musician except in Burns's "Tam o' Shanter." The last wish of Faustus was Helen of Troy. Mephistophilis fetches her, and Faustus exclaims:

"Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
And burned the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss!

. . . . . .

Here will I dwell, for Heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena:

. . . . . .

Oh, thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars."

No such verses had ever been heard on the English stage before, and this was one of the great debts our language owes to Marlowe. He first taught it what passion and fire were in its veins. The last scene of the play, in which the bond with Lucifer becomes payable, is nobly conceived. Here the verse rises to the true dramatic sympathy of which I spoke. It is swept into the vortex of Faust's eddying thought, and seems to writhe and gasp in that agony of hopeless despair: —

"Ah, Faustus,
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damned perpetually!
Stand still, ye ever-moving spheres of Heaven,
That time may cease and midnight never come;
Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul!
The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.
Oh, I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?
See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!
One drop would save my soul — half a drop; ah, my Christ!
Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!
Yet will I call on Him. Oh, spare me, Lucifer!
Where is it now? 'T is gone; and see where God
Stretcheth out His arm and bends His ireful brows!

Mountains and hills, come, come and fall on me,
And hide me from the heavy wrath of God!
No? No?
Then will I headlong run into the earth.
Earth, gape! Oh no, it will not harbor me!
. . . . . .
Ah! half the hour is past; 't will all be past anon.
O God,
If Thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,
Yet, for Christ's sake, whose blood hath ransomed me,
Impose some end to my incessant pain;
Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years —
A hundred thousand — and at last be saved!
Oh, no end 's limited to damnèd souls.
Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul?
Or why was this immortal that thou hast?
Ah, Pythagoras' metempsychosis, were that true,
This soul should fly from me, and I be changed
Unto some brutish beast! All beasts are happy,
For when they die
Their souls are soon dissolved in elements;
But mine must live still to be plagued in Hell!
Cursed be the parents that engendered me!
No, Faustus, curse thyself, curse Lucifer,
That hath deprived thee of the joys of Heaven.
Oh, it strikes! it strikes! Now, body, turn to air,
Or Lucifer will bear thee quick to Hell.
O soul, be changed to little waterdrops
And fall into the ocean; ne'er be found!
My God, my God, look not so fierce on me!
Adders and serpents, let me breathe awhile.
Ugly Hell, gape not. Come not, Lucifer!
I 'll burn my books. Ah, Mephistophilis!"

It remains to say a few words of Marlowe's poem of "Hero and Leander," for in translating it from Musæus he made it his own. It has great ease and fluency of versification, and many lines as perfect in their concinnity as those of Pope, but infused with a warmer coloring and a more poetic fancy. Here is found the verse that Shakespeare quotes

somewhere. The second verse of the following couplet has precisely Pope's cadence: —

> "Unto her was he led, or rather drawn,
> By those white limbs that sparkled through the lawn."

It was from this poem that Keats caught the inspiration for his "Endymion." A single passage will serve to prove this: —

> "So fair a church as this had Venus none:
> The walls were of discolored jasper stone,
> Wherein was Proteus carved; and overhead
> A lively vine of green sea-agate spread,
> Where by one hand light-headed Bacchus hung,
> And with the other wine from grapes outwrung."

Milton, too, learned from Marlowe the charm of those long sequences of musical proper names of which he made such effective use. Here are two passages which Milton surely had read and pondered: —

> "So from the East unto the furthest West
> Shall Tamburlaine extend his puissant arm;
> The galleys and those pilling brigantines
> That yearly sail to the Venetian gulf,
> And hover in the straits for Christians' wreck,
> Shall lie at anchor in the isle Asant,
> Until the Persian fleet and men of war
> Sailing along the Oriental sea
> Have fetched about the Indian continent,
> Even from Persepolis to Mexico,
> And thence unto the straits of Jubaltar."

This is still more Miltonic: —

> "As when the seaman sees the Hyades
> Gather an army of Cimmerian clouds,
> Auster and Aquilon with wingèd steeds,
> . . . . . .
> All fearful folds his sails and sounds the main."

Spenser, too, loved this luxury of sound, as he shows in such passages as this: —

> "Now was Aldebaran uplifted high
> Above the starry Cassiopeia's chair."

And I fancy he would have put him there to make music, even had it been astronomically impossible, but he never strung such names in long necklaces, as Marlowe and Milton were fond of doing.

Was Marlowe, then, a great poet? For such a title he had hardly range enough of power, hardly reach enough of thought. But surely he had some of the finest qualities that go to the making of a great poet; and his poetic instinct, when he had time to give himself wholly over to its guidance, was unerring. I say when he had time enough, for he, too, like his fellows, was forced to make the daily task bring in the daily bread. We have seen how fruitful his influence has been, and perhaps his genius could have no surer warrant than that the charm of it lingered in the memory of poets, for theirs is the memory of mankind. If we allow him genius, what need to ask for more? And perhaps it would be only to him among the group of dramatists who surrounded Shakespeare that we should allow it. He was the herald that dropped dead in announcing the victory in whose fruits he was not to share.

## III

## WEBSTER

In my first lecture I spoke briefly of the deficiency in respect of Form which characterizes nearly all the dramatic literature of which we are taking a summary survey, till the example of Shakespeare and the precepts of Ben Jonson wrought their natural effect. Teleology, or the argument from means to end, the argument of adaptation, is not so much in fashion in some spheres of thought and speculation as it once was, but here it applies admirably. We have a piece of work, and we know the maker of it. The next question that we ask ourselves is the very natural one — how far it shows marks of intelligent design. In a play we not only expect a succession of scenes, but that each scene should lead, by a logic more or less stringent, if not to the next, at any rate to something that is to follow, and that all should contribute their fraction of impulse towards the inevitable catastrophe. That is to say, the structure should be organic, with a necessary and harmonious connection and relation of parts, and not merely mechanical, with an arbitrary or haphazard joining of one part to another. It is in the former sense alone that any production can be called a work of art.

And when we apply the word Form in this sense to some creation of the mind, we imply that there

is a life, or, what is still better, a soul in it. That there is an intimate relation, or, at any rate, a close analogy, between Form in this its highest attribute and Imagination, is evident if we remember that the Imagination is the shaping faculty. This is, indeed, its preëminent function, to which all others are subsidiary. Shakespeare, with his usual depth of insight and the precision that comes of it, tells us that "imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown." In his maturer creations there is generally some central thought about which the action revolves like a moon, carried along with it in its appointed orbit, and permitted the gambol of a Ptolemaic epicycle now and then. But the word Form has also more limited applications, as, for example, when we use it to imply that nice sense of proportion and adaptation which results in Style. We may apply it even to the structure of a verse, or of a short poem in which every advantage has been taken of the material employed, as in Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn," which seems as perfect in its outline as the thing it so lovingly celebrates. In all these cases there often seems also to be something intuitive or instinctive in the working of certain faculties of the poet, and to this we unconsciously testify when we call it genius. But in the technic of this art, perfection can be reached only by long training, as was evident in the case of Coleridge. Of course, without the genius all the training in the world will produce only a mechanical and lifeless result; but even if the genius is there, there is nothing too seemingly trifling to deserve

its study. The "Elegy in a Country Church-yard" owes much of the charm that makes it precious, even with those who perhaps undervalue its sentiment, to Gray's exquisite sense of the value of vowel sounds.

Let us, however, come down to what is within the reach and under the control of talent and of a natural or acquired dexterity. And such a thing is the plot or arrangement of a play. In this part of their business our older playwrights are especially unskilled or negligent. They seem perfectly content if they have a story which they can divide at proper intervals by acts and scenes, and bring at last to a satisfactory end by marriage or murder, as the case may be. A certain variety of characters is necessary, but the motives that compel and control them are almost never sufficiently apparent. And this is especially true of the dramatic motives, as distinguished from the moral. The personages are brought in to do certain things and perform certain purposes of the author, but too often there seems to be no special reason why one of them should do this or that more than another. They are servants of all work, ready to be villains or fools at a moment's notice if required. The obliging simplicity with which they walk into traps which everybody can see but themselves, is sometimes almost delightful in its absurdity. Ben Jonson was perfectly familiar with the traditional principles of construction. He tells us that the fable of a drama (by which he means the plot or action) should have a beginning, a middle, and an end;

and that "as a body without proportion cannot be goodly, no more can the action, either in comedy or tragedy, without his fit bounds." But he goes on to say "that as every bound, for the nature of the subject, is esteemed the best that is largest, till it can increase no more; so it behoves the action in tragedy or comedy to be let grow till the necessity ask a conclusion; wherein two things are to be considered — first, that it exceed not the compass of one day; next, that there be place left for digression and art." The weakness of our earlier playwrights is that they esteemed those bounds best that were largest, and let their action grow till they had to stop it.

Many of Shakespeare's contemporary poets must have had every advantage that he had in practical experience of the stage, and all of them had probably as familiar an intercourse with the theatre as he. But what a difference between their manner of constructing a play and his! In all his dramatic works his skill in this is more or less apparent. In the best of them it is unrivalled. From the first scene of them he seems to have beheld as from a tower the end of all. In "Romeo and Juliet," for example, he had his story before him, and he follows it closely enough; but how naturally one scene is linked to the next, and one event leads to another! If this play were meant to illustrate anything, it would seem to be that our lives were ruled by chance. Yet there is nothing left to chance in the action of the play, which advances with the unvacillating foot of destiny. And the characters are

made to subordinate themselves to the interests of the play as to something in which they have all a common concern. With the greater part of the secondary dramatists, the characters seem like unpractised people trying to walk the deck of a ship in rough weather, who start for everywhere to bring up anywhere, and are hustled against each other in the most inconvenient way. It is only when the plot is very simple and straightforward that there is any chance of smooth water and of things going on without falling foul of each other. Was it only that Shakespeare, in choosing his themes, had a keener perception of the dramatic possibilities of a story? This is very likely, and it is certain that he preferred to take a story ready to his hand rather than invent one. All the good stories, indeed, seem to have invented themselves in the most obliging manner somewhere in the morning of the world, and to have been camp-followers when the famous march of mind set out from the farthest East. But where he invented his plot, as in the "Midsummer Night's Dream" and the "Tempest," he is careful to have it as little complicated with needless incident as possible.

These thoughts were suggested to me by the gratuitous miscellaneousness of plot (if I may so call it) in some of the plays of John Webster, concerning whose works I am to say something this evening, a complication made still more puzzling by the motiveless conduct of many of the characters. When he invented a plot of his own, as in his comedy of "The Devil's Law Case," the improb-

abilities become insuperable, by which I mean that they are such as not merely the understanding but the imagination cannot get over. For mere common-sense has little to do with the affair. Shakespeare cared little for anachronisms, or whether there were seaports in Bohemia or not, any more than Calderon cared that gunpowder had not been invented centuries before the Christian era when he wanted an arquebus to be fired, because the noise of a shot would do for him what a silent arrow would not do. But, if possible, the understanding should have as few difficulties put in its way as possible. Shakespeare is careful to place his Ariel in the not yet wholly disenchanted Bermudas, near which Sir John Hawkins had seen a mermaid not many years before, and lays the scene for his Oberon and Titania in the dim remoteness of legendary Athens, though his clowns are unmistakably English, and though he knew as well as we do that Puck was a British goblin. In estimating material improbability as distinguished from moral, however, we should give our old dramatists the benefit of the fact that all the world was a great deal farther away in those days than in ours, when the electric telegraph puts our button into the grip of whatever commonplace our planet is capable of producing.

Moreover, in respect of Webster as of his fellows, we must, in order to understand them, first naturalize our minds in *their* world. Chapman makes Byron say to Queen Elizabeth: —

> " These stars,
> Whose influences for this latitude
> Distilled, and wrought in with this temperate air,
> And this division of the elements,
> Have with your reign brought forth more worthy spirits
> For counsel, valour, height of wit, and art,
> Than any other region of the earth,
> Or were brought forth to all your ancestors."

And this is apt to be the only view we take of that Golden Age, as we call it fairly enough in one, and that, perhaps, the most superficial, sense. But it was in many ways rude and savage, an age of great crimes and of the ever-brooding suspicion of great crimes. Queen Elizabeth herself was the daughter of a king as savagely cruel and irresponsible as the Grand Turk. It was an age that in Italy could breed a Cenci, and in France could tolerate the massacre of St. Bartholomew as a legitimate stroke of statecraft. But when we consider whether crime be a fit subject for tragedy, we must distinguish. Merely as crime, it is vulgar, as are the waxen images of murderers with the very rope round their necks with which they were hanged. Crime becomes then really tragic when it merely furnishes the theme for a profound psychological study of motive and character. The weakness of Webster's two greatest plays lies in this — that crime is presented as a spectacle, and not as a means of looking into our own hearts and fathoming our own consciousness.

The scene of "The Devil's Law Case" is Naples, then a viceroyalty of Spain, and our ancestors thought anything possible in Italy. Leonora, a

widow, has a son and daughter, Romelio and Jolenta. Romelio is a rich and prosperous merchant. Jolenta is secretly betrothed to Contarino, an apparently rather spendthrift young nobleman, who has already borrowed large sums of money of Romelio on the security of his estates. Romelio is bitterly opposed to his marrying Jolenta, for reasons known only to himself; at least, no reason appears for it, except that the play could not have gone on without it. The reason he assigns is that he has a grudge against the nobility, though it appears afterwards that he himself is of noble birth, and asserts his equality with them. When Contarino, at the opening of the play, comes to urge his suit, and asks him how he looks upon it, Romelio answers: —

"Believe me, sir, as on the principal column
To advance our house; why, you bring honor with you,
Which is the soul of wealth. I shall be proud
To live to see my little nephews ride
O' the upper hand of their uncles, and the daughters
Be ranked by heralds at solemnities
Before the mother; and all this derived
From your nobility. Do not blame me, sir,
If I be taken with 't exceedingly;
For this same honor with us citizens
Is a thing we are mainly fond of, especially
When it comes without money, which is very seldom.
But as you do perceive my present temper,
Be sure I 'm yours."

And of this Contarino was sure, the irony of Romelio's speech having been so delicately conveyed that he was unable to perceive it.

A little earlier in this scene a speech is put into

the mouth of Romelio so characteristic of Webster's more sententious style that I will repeat it: —

> "O, my lord, lie not idle:
> The chiefest action for a man of great spirit
> Is never to be out of action. We should think
> The soul was never put into the body,
> Which has so many rare and curious pieces
> Of mathematical motion, to stand still.
> Virtue is ever sowing of her seeds;
> I' th' trenches for the soldiers, i' th' wakeful study
> For the scholar, in the furrows of the sea
> For men of our profession, of all which
> Arise and spring up honour."

This recalls to mind the speech of Ulysses to Achilles in "Troilus and Cressida," a piece of eloquence which, for the impetuous charge of serried argument and poetic beauty of illustration, grows more marvellous with every reading. But it is hardly fair to any other poet to let him remind us of Shakespeare.

Contarino, on leaving Romelio, goes to Leonora, the mother, who immediately conceives a violent passion for him. He, by way of a pretty compliment, tells her that he has a suit to her, and that it is for her picture. By this he meant her daughter, but with the flattering implication that you would not know the parent from the child. Leonora, of course, takes him literally, is gracious accordingly, and Contarino is satisfied that he has won her consent also. This scene gives occasion for a good example of Webster's more playful style, which is perhaps worth quoting. Still apropos of her portrait, Leonora says: —

"You will enjoin me to a strange punishment.
With what a compelled face a woman sits
While she is drawing! I have noted divers
Either to feign smiles, or suck in the lips
To have a little mouth; ruffle the cheeks
To have the dimple seen; and so disorder
The face with affectation, at next sitting
It has not been the same: I have known others
Have lost the entire fashion of their face
In half an hour's sitting. . . .
But indeed
If ever I would have mine drawn to th' life,
I 'd have a painter steal it at such a time
I were devoutly kneeling at my prayers;
There 's then a heavenly beauty in 't; the soul
Moves in the superficies."

The poet shows one of his habitual weaknesses here in being so far tempted by the chance of saying a pretty thing as to make somebody say it who naturally would not. There is really a worse waste than had it been thrown away. I am inclined to think men as vain about their portraits as Leonora makes women to be, or else the story of Cromwell's wart would not be so famous. However, Contarino goes away satisfied with the result of his embassy, saying to himself: —

"She has got some intelligence how I intend to marry
Her daughter, and ingenuously perceived
That by her picture, which I begged of her,
I meant the fair Jolenta."

There is no possible reason why he should not have conveyed this intelligence to her himself, and Leonora must have been ingenious indeed to divine it, except that the plot would not allow it. Presently another match is found for Jolenta in Ercole,

which Romelio favors for reasons again known only to himself, though he is a noble quite as much as Contarino. Ercole is the pattern of a chivalrous gentleman. Though he at once falls in love with Jolenta, according to Marlowe's rule that "he never loved that loved not at first sight," and though Romelio and the mother both urge the immediate signing of the contract, he refuses.

> "Lady, I will do
> A manly office for you; I will leave you
> To th' freedom of your own soul; may it move
> Whither Heaven and you please!
> . . . . . .
> I 'll leave you, excellent lady, and withal
> Leave a heart with you so entirely yours
> That I protest, had I the least of hope
> To enjoy you, though I were to wait the time
> That scholars do in taking their degree
> In the noble arts, 't were nothing: howsoe'er,
> He parts from you, that will depart from life
> To do you any service; and so humbly
> I take my leave."

Never, I think, was more delicate compliment paid to a woman than in that fine touch which puts the service of her on a level with the "noble arts." On this ground of sentiment idealized by devotion, Webster always moves with the assured ease and dignified familiarity of a thorough gentleman.

Ercole's pretension to the hand of Jolenta leads, of course, to a duel with Contarino. They had been fellow-students together at Padua, and the scene in which the preliminaries of the duel are arranged is pitched on as nobly grave a key as can be conceived. Lamb very justly calls it "the model

of a well-arranged and gentlemanlike difference." There is no swagger and no bravado in it, as is too commonly apt to be the case in the plays of that age. There is something Spanish in its dignity. To show what its tone is, I quote the opening. It is Contarino who first speaks.

"Sir, my love to you has proclaimed you one
Whose word was still led by a noble thought,
And that thought followed by as fair a deed.
Deceive not that opinion. We were students
At Padua together, and have long
To th' world's eye shown like friends; was it hearty
On your part to me?
*Erc.* Unfeigned.
*Con.* You are false
To the good thought I held of you, and now
Join the worst part of man to you, your malice,
To uphold that falsehood: sacred innocence
Is fled your bosom. Signior, I must tell you,
To draw the picture of unkindness truly
Is to express two that have dearly loved
And fall'n at variance; 't is a wonder to me,
Knowing my interest in the fair Jolenta,
That you should love her.
*Erc.* Compare her beauty and my youth together
And you will find the fair effects of love
No miracle at all."

They fight, and both fall mortally wounded, as it is supposed. Ercole is reported dead, and Contarino dying, having first made a will in favor of Jolenta. Romelio, disguised as a Jew, to avenge the injury to himself in the death of Ercole, and to make sure that Contarino shall not survive to alter his will, gets admission to him by bribing his surgeons, and stabs him. This saves his life by reopening the old wound and letting forth its virus.

Of course both he and Ercole recover, and both conceal themselves, though why, it is hard to say, except that they are not wanted again till towards the end of the play. Romelio, unaware of his mother's passion for Contarino, tells her, as a piece of good news she will be glad to hear, of what he has done. She at once resolves on a most horrible and unnatural revenge. Her speech has a kind of savage grandeur in it which Webster was fond of showing, for he rightly felt that it was his strongest quality, though it often tempted him too far, till it became bestial in its ferocity. It is to be observed that he was on his guard here, and gives us a hint, as you will see, in a highly imaginative passage, that Leonora's brain was turning: —

"I will make you chief mourner, believe it.
Never was woe like mine. O, that my care
And absolute study to preserve his life
Should be his absolute ruin! Is he gone, then?
There is no plague i' th' world can be compar'd
To impossible desire; for they are plagu'd
In the desire itself. Never, O, never
Shall I behold him living, in whose life
I liv'd far sweetlier than in mine own!
A precise curiosity has undone me: why did I not
Make my love known directly? 'T had not been
Beyond example for a matron
To affect i' th' honourable way of marriage
So youthful a person. O, I shall run mad!
For as we love our youngest children best,
So the last fruit of our affection,
Wherever we bestow it, is most strong,
Most violent, most unresistible,
Since 't is indeed our latest harvest-home,
Last merriment 'fore winter; and we widows,
As men report of our best picture-makers,

We love the piece we are in hand with better
Than all the excellent work we have done before.
And my son has depriv'd me of all this! Ha, my son!
I 'll be a Fury to him; like an Amazon lady,
I 'd cut off this right pap that gave him suck,
To shoot him dead. I 'll no more tender him,
Than had a wolf stol'n to my teat i' the night
And robb'd me of my milk; nay, such a creature
I should love better far. Ha, ha! what say you?
I do talk to somewhat, methinks; it may be
My evil Genius. Do not the bells ring?
I have a strange noise in my head: O, fly in pieces!
Come, age, and wither me into the malice
Of those that have been happy! Let me have
One property more than the devil of hell;
Let me envy the pleasure of youth heartily;
Let me in this life fear no kind of ill,
That have no good to hope for; let me die
In the distraction of that worthy princess
Who loathed food, and sleep, and ceremony,
For thought of losing that brave gentleman
She would fain have sav'd, had not a false conveyance
Express'd him stubborn-hearted. Let me sink
Where neither man nor memory may ever find me."

Webster forestalled Balzac by two hundred years in what he says of a woman's last passion. The revenge on which she fixes is, at the cost of her own honor, to declare Romelio illegitimate. She says that his true father was one Crispiano, a Spanish gentleman, the friend of her husband. Naturally, when the trial comes on, Crispiano, unrecognized, turns up in court as the very judge who is to preside over it. He first gets the year of the alleged adultery fixed by the oath of Leonora and her maid, and then professes to remember that Crispiano had told him of giving a portrait of himself to Leonora, has it sent for, and, revealing himself, identifies himself by it, saying, prettily enough

(those old dramatists have a way of stating dry facts so fancifully as to make them blossom, as it were),

> " Behold, I am the shadow of this shadow."

He then proves an alibi at the date in question by his friend Ariosto, whom meanwhile he has just promoted to the bench in his own place, by virtue of a convenient commission from the king of Spain, which he has in his pocket. At the end of the trial, the counsel for Leonora exclaimed : —

> " Ud's foot, we're spoiled ;
> Why, our client is proved an honest woman! "

Which I cite only because it reminds me to say that Webster has a sense of humor more delicate, and a way of showing it less coarse, than most of his brother dramatists. Meanwhile Webster saves Romelio from being hateful beyond possibility of condonation by making him perfectly fearless. He says finely : —

> " I cannot set myself so many fathom
> Beneath the height of my true heart as fear.
> Let me continue
> An honest man, which I am very certain
> A coward can never be."

The last words convey an important and even profound truth. And let me say now, once for all, that Webster abounds, more than any of his contemporaries except Chapman, in these metaphysical apothegms, and that he introduces them naturally, while Chapman is too apt to drag them in by the

ears. Here is another as good, I am tempted to say, as many of Shakespeare's, save only in avarice of words. When Leonora is suborning Winifred, her maid, to aid her in the plot against her son, she says: —

> "Come hither:
> I have a weighty secret to impart,
> But I would have thee first confirm to me
> How I may trust that thou canst keep my counsel
> Beyond death.
> *Win.* Why, mistress, 't is your only way
> To enjoin me first that I reveal to you
> The worst act I e'er did in all my life;
> One secret so shall bind another.
> *Leon.* Thou instruct'st me
> Most ingeniously; for indeed it is not fit,
> Where any act is plotted that is naught,
> Any of counsel to it should be good;
> And, in a thousand ills have happ'd i' th' world,
> The intelligence of one another's shame
> Hath wrought far more effectually than the tie
> Of conscience or religion."

The plot has other involutions of so unpleasant a nature now through change of manners that I shall but allude to them. They are perhaps intended to darken Romelio's character to the proper Websterian sable, but they certainly rather make an eddy in the current of the action than hasten it as they should.

I have briefly analyzed this play because its plot is not a bad sample of a good many others, and because the play itself is less generally known than Webster's deservedly more famous "Vittoria Corombona" and the "Duchess of Malfi." Before coming to these, I will mention his "Appius and

Virginia," a spirited, well-constructed play (for here the simplicity of the incidents kept him within bounds), and, I think, as good as any other founded on a Roman story except Shakespeare's. It is of a truly Roman temper, and perhaps, therefore, incurs a suspicion of being cast iron. Webster, like Ben Jonson, knew, theoretically at least, how a good play should be put together. In his preface to "The Devil's Law-Case" he says: "A great part of the grace of this lay in action; yet can no action ever be gracious, where the decency of the language and ingenious structure of the scene arrive not to make up a perfect harmony."

"The White Devil, or Vittoria Corombona," produced in 1612, and the "Duchess of Malfi," in 1616, are the two works by which Webster is remembered. In these plays there is almost something like a fascination of crime and horror. Our eyes dazzle with them. The imagination that conceived them is a ghastly imagination. Hell is naked before it. It is the imagination of nightmare, but of no vulgar nightmare. I would rather call it fantasy than imagination, for there is something fantastic in its creations, and the fantastic is dangerously near to the grotesque, while the imagination, where it is most authentic, is most serene. Even to elicit strong emotion, it is the still small voice that is most effective; nor is Webster unaware of this, as I shall show presently. Both these plays are full of horrors, yet they do move pity and terror strongly also. We feel that we are under the control of a usurped and illegitimate

power, but it is power. I remember seeing a picture in some Belgian church where an angel makes a motion to arrest the hand of the Almighty just as it is stretched forth in the act of the creation. If the angel foresaw that the world to be created was to be such a one as Webster conceived, we can fully understand his impulse. Through both plays there is a vapor of fresh blood and a scent of church-yard mould in the air. They are what children call *creepy*. Ghosts are ready at any moment: they seem, indeed, to have formed a considerable part of the population in those days. As an instance of the almost ludicrous way in which they were employed, take this stage direction from Chapman's "Revenge of Bussy d' Ambois." "Music, and the ghost of Bussy enters leading the ghosts of the Guise, Monsieur, Cardinal Guise, and Chatillon; they dance about the body and *exeunt*." It is fair to say that Webster's ghosts are far from comic.

Let me briefly analyze "The White Devil." Vittoria Corombona, a beautiful woman, is married to Camillo, whom she did not love. She becomes the paramour of the Duke of Brachiano, whose Duchess is the sister of Francesco de' Medici and of Cardinal Monticelso. One of the brothers of Vittoria, Flamineo, is secretary to Brachiano, and contrives to murder Camillo for them. Vittoria, as there is no sufficient proof to fix the charge of murder upon her, is tried for incontinency, and sent to a house of Convertites, whence Brachiano spirits her away, meaning to marry her. In the

mean while Brachiano's Duchess is got out of the way by poison; the lips of his portrait, which she kisses every night before going to bed, having been smeared with a deadly drug to that end. There is a Count Ludovico, who had proffered an unholy love to the Duchess, but had been repulsed by her, and he gladly offers himself as the minister of vengeance. Just as Brachiano is arming for a tournament arranged for the purpose by his brother-in-law, the Duke of Florence, Ludovico poisons his helmet, so that he shortly dies in torture. Ludovico then murders Vittoria, Zanche, her Moorish maid, and Flamineo, and is himself shot by the guards of the young Duke Giovanni, son of Brachiano, who break in upon him just as he has completed his butchery. There are but four characters in the play unstained with crime — Cornelia, Vittoria's mother; Marcello, her younger son; the Duchess of Brachiano; and her son, the young Duke. There are three scenes in the play remarkable for their effectiveness, or for their power in different ways — the trial scene of Vittoria, the death scene of Brachiano, and that of Vittoria. There is another — the burial of Marcello — which is pathetic as few men have known how to be so simply and with so little effort as Webster.

"*Fran. de' Med.* Your reverend mother
Is grown a very old woman in two hours.
I found them winding of Marcello's corse;
And there is such a solemn melody,
'Tween doleful songs, tears, and sad elegies —
Such as old grandams watching by the dead
Were wont to outwear the nights with — that, believe me,

I had no eyes to guide me forth the room,
They were so o'ercharg'd with water.
*Flam.* I will see them.
*Fran. de' Med.* 'T were much uncharity in you, for your sight
Will add unto their tears.
*Flam.* I will see them:
They are behind the traverse; I 'll discover
Their superstitious howling.
[*Draws the curtain.* Cornelia, Zanche, *and three other* Ladies *discovered winding* Marcello's *corse. A song.*
*Cor.* This rosemary is wither'd; pray, get fresh;
I would have these herbs grow up in his grave
When I am dead and rotten. Reach the bays;
I 'll tie a garland here about his head;
'T will keep my boy from lightning. This sheet
I have kept this twenty year, and every day
Hallow'd it with my prayers. I did not think
He should have wore it.
*Zanche.* Look you who are yonder.
*Cor.* O, reach me the flowers.
*Zanche.* Her ladyship 's foolish.
*Lady.* Alas, her grief
Hath turn'd her child again!
*Cor.* You 're very welcome:
There 's rosemary for you; and rue for you;
[*To* Flamineo.
Heart's-ease for you; I pray make much of it:
I have left more for myself.
*Fran. de' Med.* Lady, who 's this?
*Cor.* You are, I take it, the grave-maker.
*Flam.* So.
*Zanche.* 'T is Flamineo.
*Cor.* Will you make me such a fool? Here 's a white hand:
Can blood so soon be wash'd out? Let me see:
When screech-owls croak upon the chimney-tops,
And the strange cricket i' the oven sings and hops,
When yellow spots do on your hands appear,
Be certain then you of a corse shall hear.
Out upon 't, how 't is speckled! h'as handled a toad, sure.
Cowslip-water is good for the memory:
Pray, buy me three ounces of 't.

*Flam.* I would I were from hence.
*Cor.* Do you hear, sir ?
I 'll give you a saying which my grandmother
Was wont, when she heard the bell toll, to sing o'er
Unto her lute.
*Flam.* Do, an you will, do.
*Cor.* ' Call for the robin-redbreast and the wren,
[Cornelia *doth this in several forms of distraction.*
Since o'er shady groves they hover,
And with leaves and flowers do cover
The friendless bodies of unburied men.
Call unto his funeral dole
The ant, the field-mouse, and the mole,
To rear him hillocks that shall keep him warm,
And (when gay tombs are robb'd) sustain no harm,
But keep the wolf far thence, that 's foe to men,
For with his nails he 'll dig them up again.'
They would not bury him 'cause he died in a quarrel ;
But I have an answer for them :
' Let holy church receive him duly,
Since he paid the church-tithes truly.'
His wealth is summ'd, and this is all his store ;
This poor men get, and great men get no more.
Now the wares are gone, we may shut up shop.
Bless you all, good people !
[*Exeunt* Cornelia, Zanche, *and* Ladies.
*Flam.* I have a strange thing in me, to the which
I cannot give a name, without it be
Compassion. I pray, leave me."

In the trial scene the defiant haughtiness of Vittoria, entrenched in her illustrious birth, against the taunts of the Cardinal, making one think of Browning's Ottima, "magnificent in sin," excites a sympathy which must check itself if it would not become admiration. She dies with the same unconquerable spirit, not shaming in death at least the blood of the Vitelli that ran in her veins. As

to Flamineo, I think it plain that but for Iago he would never have existed; and it has always interested me to find in Webster more obvious reminiscences of Shakespeare, without conscious imitation of him, than in any other dramatist of the time. Indeed, the style of Shakespeare cannot be imitated, because it is the expression of his individual genius. Coleridge tells us that he thought he was copying it when writing the tragedy of "Remorse," and found, when all was done, that he had reproduced Massinger instead. Iago seems to me one of Shakespeare's most extraordinary divinations. He has embodied in him the corrupt Italian intellect of the Renaissance. Flamineo is a more degraded example of the same type, but without Iago's motives of hate and revenge. He is a mere incarnation of selfish sensuality. These two tragedies of "Vittoria Corombona" and the "Duchess of Malfi" are, I should say, the most vivid pictures of that repulsively fascinating period that we have in English. Alfred de Musset's "Lorenzaccio" is, however, far more terrible, because there the horror is moral wholly, and never physical, as too often in Webster.

There is something in Webster that reminds me of Victor Hugo. There is the same confusion at times of what is big with what is great, the same fondness for the merely spectacular, the same insensibility to repulsive details, the same indifference to the probable or even to the natural, the same leaning toward the grotesque, the same love of effect at whatever cost; and there is also the same

impressiveness of result. Whatever other effect Webster may produce upon us, he never leaves us indifferent. We may blame, we may criticise, as much as we will; we may say that all this ghastliness is only a trick of theatrical blue-light; we shudder, and admire nevertheless. We may say he is melodramatic, that his figures are magic-lantern pictures that waver and change shape with the curtain on which they are thrown: it matters not; he stirs us with an emotion deeper than any mere artifice could stir.

## IV

## CHAPMAN

As I turn from one to another of the old dramatists, and see how little is known about their personal history, I find a question continually coming back, invincible as a fly with a strong sense of duty, which I shall endeavor to fan away by a little discussion. This question is whether we gain or lose by our ignorance of the personal details of their history. Would it make any difference in our enjoyment of what they wrote, if we had the means of knowing that one of them was a good son, or the other a bad husband? that one was a punctual paymaster, and that the other never paid his washer-woman for the lustration of the legendary single shirt without which he could not face a neglectful world, or hasten to the theatre with the manuscript of the new play for which posterity was to be more thankful than the manager? Is it a love of knowledge or of gossip that renders these private concerns so interesting to us, and makes us willing to intrude on the awful seclusion of the dead, or to flatten our noses against the windows of the living? The law is more scrupulous than we in maintaining the inviolability of private letters. Are we to profit by every indiscretion, by every

breach of confidence? Of course, in whatever the man himself has made a part of the record we are entitled to find what intimations we can of his genuine self, of the real man, veiled under the draperies of convention and circumstance, who was visible for so many years, yet perhaps never truly seen, obscurely known to himself, conjectured even by his intimates, and a mere name to all beside. And yet how much do we really know even of men who profess to admit us to every corner of their nature — of Montaigne? of Rousseau? As in the box under the table at which the automaton chess-player sat, there is always a closet within that which is so frankly opened to us, and into this the enigma himself absconds while we are staring at nothing in the other. Even in autobiographies, it is only by inadvertencies, by unconscious betrayals when the author is off his guard, that we make our discoveries. In a man's works we read between the lines, not always wisely. No doubt there is an intense interest in watching the process by which a detective critic like Sainte-Beuve dogs his hero or his victim, as the case may be, with tireless sympathy or vindictive sagacity, tracking out clew after clew, and constructing out of the life a comment on the works, or, again, from the works divining the character. But our satisfaction depends upon the bias with which the inquisition is conducted, and, after assisting at this process in the case of Châteaubriand, for example, are we sure that we know the man better, or only what was morbid in the man, which, perhaps, it was not profitable for us to know?

But is it not after the discreditable particulars which excite a correspondingly discreditable curiosity that we are eager, and these that we read with greatest zest? So it should seem if we judged by the fact that biography, and especially that of men of letters, tends more and more towards these indecent exposures. The concern of the biographer should be with the mind, and not with the body of his victim. We are willing to be taken into the parlor and the library, but may fairly refuse to be dragged down to the kitchen or to look into the pantry. Boswell's "Life of Johnson" does not come under this condemnation, being mainly a record of the great doctor's opinions, and, since done with his own consent, is almost to be called autobiographical. There are certain memoirs after reading which one blushes as if he had not only been peeping through a key-hole, but had been caught in the act. No doubt there is a fearful truth in Shakespeare's saying, —

> "The evil that men do lives after them,"

but I should limit it to the evil done by otherwise good men, for it is only in this kind of evil that others will seek excuse for what they are tempted to do, or palliation for what they have already done. I like to believe, and to think I see reason for believing, that it is the good that is in men which is immortal, and beneficently immortal, and that the sooner the perishable husk in which it was enveloped is suffered to perish and crumble away, the sooner we shall know them as they really were. I

remember how Longfellow used to laugh in his kindly way when he told the story of the French visitor who asked him for some *révélations intimes* of his domestic life, to be published in a Paris newspaper. No man would have lost less by the most staring light that could have been admitted to those sacred retreats, but he shrank instinctively from being an accomplice to its admission. I am not sure that I ought to be grateful for the probable identification of the Dark Lady to whom twenty-five of Shakespeare's sonnets are addressed, much as I should commend the research and acuteness that rendered it possible. We had, indeed, more than suspected that these sonnets had an address within the bills of mortality, for no such red-blooded flame as this sometimes is ever burned on the altar of the Ideal. But whoever she was, she was unembodied so long as she was nameless, she moved about in a world not realized, sacred in her inaccessibility, a fainter image of that image of her which had been mirrored in the poet's eyes; and this vulgarization of her into flesh and blood seems to pull down the sonnets from heaven's sweetest air to the turbid level of our earthier apprehension. Here is no longer an object for the upward, but for the furtive and sidelong glance. A gentleman once told me that being compelled to part with some family portraits, he requested a dealer to price that of a collateral ancestress by Gainsborough. He thought the sum offered surprisingly small, and said so.

"I beg your pardon for asking the question," said the dealer, "but business is business. You are

not, I understand, a direct descendant of this lady. Was her name ever connected with any scandal? If so, I could double my offer."

Somewhere in our in-human nature there must be an appetite for these unsavory personalities, but they are degrading in a double sense — degrading to him whose secret is betrayed, and to him who consents to share in the illicit knowledge of it. These things are none of our business, and yet it is remarkable how scrupulously exact even those most neglectful in their own affairs are in attending to the business of other people. I think, on the whole, that it is fortunate for us that our judgment of what the old dramatists did should be so little disturbed by any misinformation as to what they were, for to be imperfectly informed is to be misinformed, and even to look through contemporary eyes is to look through very crooked glass. Sometimes we may draw a pretty infallible inference as to a man's temperament, though not as to his character, from his writings. And this, I think, is the case with Chapman.

George Chapman was born at Hitchin, in Hertfordshire, in 1559 probably, though Anthony Wood makes him two years older, and died in London on the 12th of May, 1634. He was buried in the church-yard of St. Giles in the Fields, where the monument put up over him by Inigo Jones is still standing. He was five years older than Shakespeare, whom he survived for nearly twenty years, and fifteen years older than Ben Jonson, who outlived him three years. There is good ground for

believing that he studied at both Universities, though he took a degree at neither. While there he is said to have devoted himself to the classics, and to have despised philosophy. This contempt, however, seems to me somewhat doubtful, for he is certainly the most obtrusively metaphysical of all our dramatists. After leaving the University, he is supposed to have travelled, which is as convenient a way as any other to fill up the gap of sixteen years between 1578, when he ended his academic studies, and 1594, when we first have notice of him in London, during which period he vanishes altogether. Whether he travelled in France and Italy or not, he seems to have become in some way familiar with the languages of those countries, and there is some reason for thinking that he understood German also. We have two glimpses of him during his life in London. In 1605 he, with Jonson and Marston, produced a play called "Eastward Ho!" Some "injurious reflections" on the Scottish nation in it angered King James, and the authors were imprisoned for a few days in the Fleet. Again, in 1606, the French ambassador, Beaumont, writes to his master: "I caused certain players to be forbid from acting 'The History of the Duke of Biron;' when, however, they saw that the whole court had left town, they persisted in acting it; nay, they brought upon the stage the Queen of France and Mlle. de Verneuil. The former having first accosted the latter with very hard words, gave her a box on the ear. At my suit three of them were arrested; but the principal

person, the author, escaped." This was Chapman's tragedy, and in neither of the editions printed two years later does the objectionable passage appear. It is curious that this interesting illustration of the history of the English stage should have been unearthed from the French archives by Von Raumer in his "History of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries."

Chapman was a man of grave character and regular life. We may, perhaps, infer from some passages in his plays that he heartily hated Puritans. There are other passages that might lead one to suspect him of a leaning towards Catholicism, or at least of regretting the schism of the Reformation. The scene of "Byron's Conspiracy" and "Byron's Tragedy" is laid in France, to be sure, in the time of Henry IV., but not to mention that Chapman's characters are almost always the mere mouth-pieces of his own thought, there is a fervor in the speeches to which I have alluded which gives to them an air of personal conviction. In "Byron's Tragedy" there is a eulogy of Philip II. and his policy very well worth reading by those who like to keep their minds judicially steady, for it displays no little historical insight. It certainly shows courage and independence to have written such a vindication only eighteen years after the Armada, and when national prejudice against Spain was so strong.

Chapman's friendships are the strongest testimonials we have of his character. Prince Henry, whose untimely death may have changed the course

of English history, and with it that of our own, was his patron. So was Carr, Earl of Somerset, whom he did not desert in ill fortune. Inigo Jones was certainly his intimate friend; and he is said to have been, though it seems doubtful, on terms of friendly intercourse with Bacon. In dedicating his "Byron's Conspiracy" to Sir Thomas Walsingham, he speaks as to an old friend. With his fellow-poets he appears to have been generally on good terms. His long life covered the whole of the Elizabethan age of literature, and before he died he might have read the earlier poems of Milton.

He wrote seven comedies and eight tragedies that have come down to us, and probably others that have perished. Nearly all his comedies are formless and coarse, but with what seems to me a kind of stiff and wilful coarseness, as if he were trying to make his personages speak in what he supposed to be their proper dialect, in which he himself was unpractised, having never learned it in those haunts, familiar to most of his fellow-poets, where it was vernacular. His characters seem, indeed, types, and he frankly proclaims himself an idealist in the dedication of "The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois" to Sir Thomas Howard, where he says, "And for the authentical truth of either person or action, who (worth the respecting) will expect it in a Poem whose subject is not truth, but things like truth?" Of his comedies, "All Fools" is by general consent the best. It is less lumpish than the others, and is, on the whole, lively and amusing. In his comedies he indulges himself

freely in all that depreciation of woman which had been so long traditional with the sex which has the greatest share in making them what they are. But he thought he was being comic, and there is, on the whole, no more depressing sight than a naturally grave man under that delusion. His notion of love, too, is coarse and animal, or rather the notion he thinks proper to express through his characters. And yet in his comedies there are two passages, one in praise of love, and the other of woman, certainly among the best of their kind. The first is a speech of Valerio in "All Fools:" —

> "I tell thee love is Nature's second sun
> Causing a spring of virtues where he shines;
> And as without the sun, the world's great eye,
> All colors, beauties, both of art and nature,
> Are given in vain to men, so without love
> All beauties bred in women are in vain,
> All virtues born in men lie buried;
> For love informs them as the sun doth colors;
> And as the sun, reflecting his warm beams
> Against the earth, begets all fruits and flowers,
> So love, fair shining in the inward man,
> Brings forth in him the honorable fruits
> Of valor, wit, virtue, and haughty thoughts,
> Brave resolution and divine discourse:
> O, 't is the paradise, the heaven of earth!
> And didst thou know the comfort of two hearts
> In one delicious harmony united,
> As to enjoy one joy, think both one thought,
> Live both one life and therein double life,
> . . . . . .
> Thou wouldst abhor thy tongue for blasphemy."

And now let me read to you a passage in praise of women from "The Gentleman Usher." It is

not great poetry, but it has fine touches of discrimination both in feeling and expression: —

> "Let no man value at a little price
> A virtuous woman's counsel; her winged spirit
> Is feathered oftentimes with heavenly words,
> And, like her beauty, ravishing and pure;
> The weaker body still the stronger soul.
> . . . . . .
> O what a treasure is a virtuous wife,
> Discreet and loving! not one gift on earth
> Makes a man's life so highly bound to heaven;
> She gives him double forces, to endure
> And to enjoy, by being one with him."

Then, after comparing her with power, wealth, music, and delicate diet, which delight but imperfectly, —

> "But a true wife both sense and soul delights,
> And mixeth not her good with any ill.
> All store without her leaves a man but poor,
> And with her poverty is exceeding store."

Chapman himself, in a passage of his "Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois," condemns the very kind of comedy he wrote as a concession to public taste: —

> "Nay, we must now have nothing brought on stages
> But puppetry, and pied ridiculous antics;
> Men thither come to laugh and feed fool-fat,
> Check at all goodness there as being profaned;
> When wheresoever goodness comes, she makes
> The place still sacred, though with other feet
> Never so much 't is scandaled and polluted.
> Let me learn anything that fits a man,
> In any stables shown, as well as stages."

Of his tragedies, the general judgment has pronounced "Byron's Conspiracy" and "Byron's Tragedy" to be the finest, though they have less genu-

ine poetical ecstasy than his "d'Ambois." The "Tragedy of Chabot, Admiral of France," is almost wholly from his hand, as all its editors agree, and as is plain from internal evidence, for Chapman has some marked peculiarities of thought and style which are unmistakable. Because Shirley had some obscure share in it, it is printed with his works, and omitted by the latest editor of Chapman. Yet it is far more characteristic of him than "Alphonsus," or "Cæsar and Pompey." The character of Chabot has a nobility less prompt to vaunt itself, less conscious of itself, less obstreperous, I am tempted to say, than is common with Chapman. There is one passage in the play which I will quote, because of the plain allusion in it to the then comparatively recent fate of Lord Bacon. I am not sure whether it has been before remarked or not. The Lord Chancellor of France is impeached of the same crimes with Bacon. He is accused also of treacherous cruelty to Chabot, as Bacon was reproached for ingratitude to Essex. He is sentenced like him to degradation of rank, to a heavy fine, and to imprisonment at the King's pleasure. Like Bacon, again, he twice confesses his guilt before sentence is passed on him, and throws himself on the King's mercy: —

"Hear me, great Judges; if you have not lost
For my sake all your charities, I beseech you
Let the King know my heart is full of penitence;
Calm his high-going sea, or in that tempest
I ruin to eternity. O, my lords,
Consider your own places and the helms
You sit at; while with all your providence

You steer, look forth and see devouring quicksands!
My ambition now is punished, and my pride
Of state and greatness falling into nothing;
I, that had never time, through vast employments,
To think of Heaven, feel His revengeful wrath
Boiling my blood and scorching up my entrails.
There 's doomsday in my conscience, black and horrid,
For my abuse of justice; but no stings
Prick with that terror as the wounds I made
Upon the pious Admiral. Some good man
Bear my repentance thither; he is merciful,
And may incline the King to stay his lightning,
Which threatens my confusion, that my free
Resign of title, office, and what else
My pride look'd at, would buy my poor life's safety;
Forever banish me the Court, and let
Me waste my life far-off in some mean village."

After the Chancellor's sentence, his secretary says: —

"I could have wished him fall on softer ground
For his good parts."

Bacon's monument, in St. Michael's Church at St. Alban's, was erected by *his* secretary, Sir Thomas Meautys. Bacon did not appear at his trial; but there are several striking parallels between his letters of confession and the speech you have just heard.

Another posthumously published tragedy of Chapman's, the "Revenge for Honor," is, in conception, the most original of them all, and the plot seems to be of his own invention. It has great improbabilities, but as the story is Oriental, we find it easier to forgive them. It is, on the whole, a very striking play, and with more variety of character in it than is common with Chapman.

In general he seems to have been led to the choice of his heroes (and these sustain nearly the whole weight of the play in which they figure) by some half-conscious sympathy of temperament. They are impetuous, have an overweening self-confidence, and an orotund way of expressing it that fitted them perfectly to be the mouth-pieces for an eloquence always vehement and impassioned, sometimes rising to a sublimity of self-assertion. Where it is fine, it is nobly fine, but too often it raves itself into a kind of fury recalling Hamlet's word "robustious," and seems to be shouted through a speaking-trumpet in a gale of wind. He is especially fond of describing battles, and the rush of his narration is then like a charge of cavalry. Of his first tragedy, "Bussy d'Ambois," Dryden says, with that mixture of sure instinct and hasty judgment which makes his prose so refreshing: "I have sometimes wondered in the reading what has become of those glaring colors which amazed me in 'Bussy d'Ambois' upon the theatre; but when I had taken up what I supposed a falling star, I found I had been cozened with a jelly, nothing but a cold dull mass, which glittered no longer than it was shooting; a dwarfish thought dressed up in gigantic words, repetition in abundance, looseness of expression, and gross hyperbole; the sense of one line expanded prodigiously into ten; and, to sum up all, incorrect English, and a hideous mingle of false poetry and true nonsense; or, at best, a scantling of wit which lay gasping for life and groaning beneath a heap of rubbish."

There *is* hyperbole in Chapman, and perhaps Dryden saw it the more readily and disliked it the more that his own tragedies are full of it. But Dryden was always hasty, not for the first time in speaking of Chapman. I am pretty safe in saying that he had probably only run his eye over "Bussy d'Ambois," and that it did not happen to fall on any of those finely inspired passages which are not only more frequent in it than in any other of Chapman's plays, but of a more purely poetical quality. Dryden was irritated by a consciousness of his own former barbarity of taste, which had led him to prefer Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas. What he says as to the success of "Bussy d'Ambois" on the stage is interesting.

In saying that the sense of "one line is prodigiously expanded into ten," Dryden certainly puts his finger on one of Chapman's faults. He never knew when to stop. But it is not true that the sense is expanded, if by that we are to understand that Chapman watered his thought to make it fill up. There is abundance of thought in him, and of very suggestive thought too, but it is not always in the right place. He is the most sententious of our poets — sententious to a fault, as we feel in his continuation of "Hero and Leander." In his annotations to the sixteenth book of his translation of the Iliad, he seems to have been thinking of himself in speaking of Homer. He says: "And here have we ruled a case against our plain and smug writers, that, because their own un-

wieldiness will not let them rise themselves, would have every man grovel like them. . . . But herein this case is ruled against such men that they affirm these hyperthetical or superlative sort of expressions and illustrations are too bold and bumbasted, and out of that word is spun that which they call our fustian, their plain writing being stuff nothing so substantial, but such gross sowtege or hairpatch as every goose may eat oats through. . . . But the chief end why I extend this annotation is only to entreat your note here of Homer's manner of writing, which, to utter his after-store of matter and variety, is so presse and puts on with so strong a current that it far overruns the most laborious pursuer if he have not a poetical foot and Poesy's quick eye to guide it."

Chapman has indeed a "great after-store of matter" which encumbers him, and does sometimes "far overrun the most laborious pursuer," but many a poetical foot, with Poesy's quick eye to guide it, has loved to follow. He has kindled an enthusiasm of admiration such as no other poet of his day except Shakespeare has been able to kindle. In this very play of "Bussy d'Ambois" there is a single line of which Charles Lamb says that "in all poetry I know nothing like it." When Chapman *is* fine, it is in a way all his own. There is then an incomparable amplitude in his style, as when, to quote a phrase from his translation of Homer, the Lightener Zeus "lets down a great sky out of heaven." There is a quality of northwestern wind in it, which, if sometimes too

blusterous, is yet taken into the lungs with an exhilarating expansion. Hyperbole is overshooting the mark. No doubt Chapman sometimes did this, but this excess is less depressing than its opposite, and at least proves vigor in the bowman. His bow was like that of Ulysses, which none could bend but he, and even where the arrow went astray, it sings as it flies, and one feels, to use his own words, as if it were

> "the shaft
> Shot at the sun by angry Hercules,
> And into splinters by the thunder broken."

Dryden taxes Chapman with "incorrect English." This is altogether wrong. His English is of the best, and far less licentious than Dryden's own, which was also the best of its kind. Chapman himself says (or makes Montsurry in "Bussy d'Ambois" say for him): —

> "Worthiest poets
> Shun common and plebeian forms of speech,
> Every illiberal and affected phrase,
> To clothe their matter, and together tie
> Matter and form with art and decency."

And yet I should say that if Chapman's English had any fault, it comes of his fondness for homespun words, and for images which, if not essentially vulgar, become awkwardly so by being forced into company where they feel themselves out of place. For example, in the poem which prefaces his Homer, full of fine thought, fitly uttered in his large way, he suddenly compares the worldlings he is denouncing to "an itching horse

leaning to a block or a May-pole." He would have justified himself, I suppose, by Homer's having compared Ajax to an ass, for I think he really half believed that the spirit of Homer had entered into him and replaced his own. So in "Bussy," —

> "Love is a razor cleansing if well used,
> But fetcheth blood still being the least abused."

But I think the incongruity is to be explained as an unconscious reaction (just as we see men of weak character fond of strong language) against a partiality he felt in himself for costly phrases. His fault is not the purple patch upon frieze, but the patch of frieze upon purple. In general, one would say that his style was impetuous like the man himself, and wants the calm which is the most convincing evidence of great power that has no misgivings of itself. I think Chapman figured forth his own ideal in his "Byron:" —

> "Give me a spirit that on this life's rough sea
> Loves to have his sails filled with a lusty wind,
> Even till his sail-yards tremble, his masts crack,
> And his rapt ship run on her side so low
> That she drinks water and her keel ploughs air.
> There is no danger to a man that knows
> What life and death is; there 's not any law
> Exceeds his knowledge; neither is it lawful
> That he should stoop to any other law."

Professor Minto thinks that the rival poet of whom Shakespeare speaks in his eighty-sixth sonnet was Chapman, and enough confirmation of this theory may be racked out of dates and other circumstances to give it at least some probability.

However this may be, the opening line of the sonnet contains as good a characterization of Chapman's style as if it had been meant for him: —

"Was it the proud full sail of his great verse?"

I have said that Chapman was generally on friendly terms with his brother poets. But there is a passage in the preface to the translation of the Iliad which marks an exception. He says: "And much less I weigh the frontless detractions of some stupid ignorants, that, no more knowing me than their beastly ends, and I ever (to my knowledge) blest from their sight, whisper behind me vilifyings of my translation, out of the French affirming them, when, both in French and all other languages but his own, our with-all-skill-enriched Poet is so poor and unpleasing that no man can discern from whence flowed his so generally given eminence and admiration." I know not who was intended, but the passage piques my curiosity. In what is said about language there is a curious parallel with what Ben Jonson says of Shakespeare, and the "generally given eminence and admiration" applies to him also. The "with-all-skill-enriched" reminds me of another peculiarity of Chapman — his fondness for compound words. He seems to have thought that he condensed more meaning into a phrase if he dovetailed all its words together by hyphens. This sometimes makes the verses of his translation of Homer difficult to read musically, if not metrically.

Chapman has been compared with Seneca, but

I see no likeness in their manner unless we force an analogy between the rather braggart Hercules of the one and d'Ambois of the other. The most famous passage in Seneca's tragedies is, I suppose, the answer of Medea when asked what remains to her in her desertion and danger: "*Medea superest.*" This is as unlike Chapman as he is unlike Marlowe or Webster. His genius never could have compressed itself into so laconic a casket. Here would have been a chance for him to dilate like Teneriffe or Atlas, and he would have done it ample justice. If ever there was a case in which Buffon's saying that the style is the man fitted exactly, it is in that of Chapman. Perhaps I ought to have used the word "mannerism" instead of "style," for Chapman had not that perfect control of his matter which "style" implies. On the contrary, his matter seems sometimes to do what it will with him, which is the characteristic of mannerism. I can think of no better example of both than Sterne, alternately victim of one and master of the other. His mannerism at last becomes irritating affectation, but when he throws it off, his style is perfect in simplicity of rhythm. There is no more masterly page of English prose than that in the "Sentimental Journey" describing the effect of the chorus, "O Cupid, King of Gods and Men," on the people of Abdera.

As a translator, and he translated a great deal besides Homer, Chapman has called forth the most discordant opinions. It is plain from his prefaces and annotations that he had discussed with himself

the various theories of translation, and had chosen that which prefers the spirit to the letter. "I dissent," he says, speaking of his translation of the Iliad, "from all other translators and interpreters that ever essayed exposition of this miraculous poem, especially where the divine rapture is most exempt from capacity in grammarians merely and grammatical critics, and where the inward sense or soul of the sacred muse is only within eyeshot of a poetical spirit's inspection." This rapture, however, is not to be found in his translation of the Odyssey, he being less in sympathy with the quieter beauties of that exquisite poem. Cervantes said long ago that no poet is translatable, and he said truly, for his thoughts will not *sing* in any language but their own. Even where the languages are of common parentage, like English and German, the feat is impossible. Who ever saw a translation of one of Heine's songs into English from which the genius had not utterly vanished? We cannot translate the music; above all, we cannot translate the indefinable associations which have gathered round the poem, giving it more meaning to us, perhaps, than it ever had for the poet himself. In turning it into our own tongue the translator has made it foreign to us for the first time. Why, we do not like to hear any one read aloud a poem that we love, because he translates it into something unfamiliar as he reads. But perhaps it is fair, and this is sometimes forgotten, to suppose that a translation is intended only for such as have no knowledge of the original,

and to whom it will be a new poem. If that be so, there can be no question that a free reproduction, a transfusion into the moulds of another language, with an absolute deference to its associations, whether of the ear or of the memory, is the true method. There are no more masterly illustrations of this than the versions from the Greek, Persian, and Spanish of the late Mr. Fitzgerald. His translations, however else they may fail, make the same vivid impression on us that an original would. He has aimed at translating the genius, in short, letting all else take care of itself, and has succeeded. Chapman aimed at the same thing, and I think has also succeeded. You all remember Keats's sonnet on first looking in his Homer:

> "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken."

Whether Homer or not, his translation is at least not Milton, as those in blank verse strive without much success to be. If the Greek original had been lost, and we had only Chapman, would it not enable us to divine some of the chief qualities of that original? I think it would; and I think this perhaps the fairest test. Commonly we open a translation as it were the door of a house of mourning. It is the burial-service of our poet that is going on there. But Chapman's poem makes us feel as if Homer late in life had married an English wife, and we were invited to celebrate the coming of age of their only son. The boy, as our country people say, and as Chapman would have

said, favors his mother; there is very little Greek in him; and yet a trick of the gait now and then, and certain tones of voice, recall the father. If not so tall as he, and without his dignity, he is a fine stalwart fellow, and looks quite able to make his own way in the world. Yes, in Chapman's poem there is life, there is energy, and the consciousness of them. Did not Dryden say admirably well that it was such a poem as we might fancy Homer to have written before he arrived at years of discretion? Its defect is, I should say, that in it Homer is translated into Chapman rather than into English.

Chapman is a poet for intermittent rather than for consecutive reading. He talks too loud and is too emphatic for continuous society. But when you leave him, you feel that you have been in the company of an original, and hardly know why you should not say a great man. From his works, one may infer an individuality of character in him such as we can attribute to scarce any other of his contemporaries, though originality was far cheaper then than now. A lofty, impetuous man, ready to go off without warning into what he called a "holy fury," but capable of inspiring an almost passionate liking. Had only the best parts of what he wrote come down to us, we should have reckoned him a far greater poet than we can fairly call him. His fragments are truly Cyclopean.

## V

## BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER

The names of Beaumont and Fletcher are as inseparably linked together as those of Castor and Pollux. They are the double stars of our poetical firmament, and their beams are so indissolubly mingled that it is in vain to attempt any division of them that shall assign to each his rightful share. So long as they worked in partnership, Jasper Mayne says truly that they are

> "both so knit
> That no man knows where to divide their wit,
> Much less their praise."

William Cartwright says of Fletcher: —

> "That 't was his happy fault to do too much;
> Who therefore wisely did submit each birth
> To knowing Beaumont, ere it did come forth,
> And made him the sobriety of his wit."

And Richard Brome also alludes to the copious ease of Fletcher, whom he had known: —

> "Of Fletcher and his works I speak.
> His works! says Momus, nay, his plays you 'd say!
> Thou hast said right, for that to him was play
> Which was to others' brains a toil."

The general tradition seems to have been that Beaumont contributed the artistic judgment, and Fletcher the fine frenzy. There is commonly a grain of truth in traditions of this kind. In the

plays written by the two poets conjointly, we may find an intellectual entertainment in assigning this passage to one and that to the other, but we can seldom say decisively "This is Beaumont's," or "That is Fletcher's," though we may find tolerably convincing arguments for it.

We have, it is true, some grounds on which we may safely form a conclusion as to the individual characteristics of Fletcher, because a majority of the plays which go under their joint names were written by him alone after Beaumont's death. In these I find a higher and graver poetical quality, and I think a riper grain of sentiment, than in any of the others. In running my eye along the margin, I observe that by far the greater number of the isolated phrases I have marked, whether for poetical force or felicity, but especially for picturesqueness, and for weight of thought, belong to Fletcher. I should never suspect Beaumont's hand in such verses as these from "Bonduca" (a play wholly Fletcher's): —

> "Ten years of bitter nights and heavy marches,
> When many a frozen storm sung through my cuirass,
> And made it doubtful whether that or I
> Were the more stubborn metal."

Where I come upon a picturesque passage in the joint plays, I am apt to think it Fletcher's: so too where there is a certain exhilaration and largeness of manner, and an ardor that charges its words with imagination as they go, or with an enthusiasm that comes very near it in its effect. Take this from the same play: —

> " The gods of Rome fight for ye; loud fame calls ye,
> Pitched on the topless Apennine, and blows
> To all the underworld, all nations, seas,
> And unfrequented deserts where the snow dwells,
> Wakens the ruined monuments, and there,
> Where nothing but eternal death and sleep is,
> Informs again the dead bones with your virtues."

In short, I am inclined to think Fletcher the more poet of the two. Where there is pathos or humor, I am in doubt whether it belongs to him or his partner, for I find these qualities both in the plays they wrote together and in those which are wholly his. In the expression of sentiment going far enough to excite a painless æsthetic sympathy, but stopping short of tragic passion, Beaumont is quite the equal of his friend. In the art of heightening and enriching such a sentiment by poetical associations and pictorial accessories, Fletcher seems to me the superior. Both, as I have said, have the art of being pathetic, and of conceiving pathetic situations; but neither of them had depth enough of character for that tragic pathos which is too terrible for tears; for those passionate convulsions when our human nature, like the sea in earthquake, is sucked away deep down from its habitual shores, leaving bare for a moment slimy beds stirring with loathsome life, and weedy tangles before undreamed of, and instantly hidden again under the rush of its reaction. Theirs are no sudden revelations, flashes out of the very tempest itself, and born of its own collisions; but much rather a melancholy Ovidian grace like that of the Heroic Epistles, conscious of itself, yet

not so conscious as to beget distrust and make us feel as if we had been cheated of our tenderness. If they ope the sacred source of sympathetic tears, it is not without due warning and ceremonious preparation. I do not mean to say that their sentiment is not real, because it is pensive and not passionate. It is real, but it is never heart-rending. I say it all in saying that their region is that of fancy. Fancy and imagination may be of one substance, as the northern lights and lightning are supposed to be; but the one plays and flickers in harmless flashes and streamers over the vault of the brain, the other condenses all its thought-executing fires into a single stab of flame. And so of their humor. It is playful, intellectual, elaborate, like that of Charles Lamb when he trifles with it, pleasing itself with artificial dislocations of thought, and never glancing at those essential incongruities in the nature of things at sight of which humor shakes its bells, and mocks that it may not shudder.

Their comedies are amusing, and one of them, "Wit without Money," is excellent, with some scenes of joyous fun in it that are very cheering. The fourth scene of the third act is a masterpiece of fanciful extravagance. This is probably Fletcher's. The Rev. W. Cartwright preferred Fletcher's wit to Shakespeare's : —

> "Shakespeare to thee was dull: whose best jest lies
> I' th' ladies' questions and the fools' replies.
> Nature was all his art; thy vein was free
> As his, but without his scurrility."

Posterity has taken leave to differ with the Rev. W. Cartwright. The conversations in Fletcher's comedies are often lively, but the wit is generally a gentlemanlike banter; that is, what was gentlemanlike in that day. Real wit keeps; real humor is of the same nature in Aristophanes and Mark Twain; but nothing grows mouldy so soon as mere fun, the product of animal spirits. Fletcher had far more of this than of true humor. Both he and Beaumont were skilled in that pleasantry which in good society is the agreeable substitute for the more trenchant article. There is an instance of this in Miramont's commendation of Greek in the "Elder Brother:" —

> "Though I can speak no Greek, I love the sound on't;
> It goes so thundering as it conjured devils;
> Charles speaks it loftily, and, if thou wert a man,
> Or had'st but ever heard of Homer's Iliads,
> Hesiod and the Greek poets, thou would'st run mad,
> And hang thyself for joy thou 'dst such a gentleman
> To be thy son. O, he has read such things
> To me!"
>
> "And do you understand 'em, brother?"
>
> "I tell thee no; that 's not material; the sound 's
> Sufficient to confirm an honest man."

The speech of Lucio in the "Woman-hater" has a smack of Molière in it: —

> "Secretary, fetch the gown I used to read petitions in, and the standish I answer French letters with."

Many of the comedies are impersonations of what were then called humors, like the "Little French Lawyer;" and some, like the "Knight of the Burning Pestle," mere farces. Nearly all have the merit of being lively and amusing, which,

to one who has read many comedies, is saying a great deal.

In what I said just now I did not mean that Fletcher does not sometimes show an almost tragic power, as he constantly does tragic sensibility. There are glimpses of it in "Thierry and Theodoret," and in the death-scene of the little Hengo in "Bonduca." Perhaps I should rather say that he can conceive a situation with some true elements of tragedy, though not of the deepest tragedy, in it; but when he comes to work it out, and make it visible to us in words, he seems to feel himself more at home with the pity than the terror of it. His pathos (and this is true of Beaumont also) is mixed with a sweetness that grows cloying. And it is always the author who is speaking, and whom we hear. At best he rises only to a simulated passion, and that leads inevitably to declamation. There is no pang in it, but rather the hazy softness of remembered sorrow. Lear on the heath, at parley with the elements, makes all our pettier griefs contemptible, and the sublime pathos of that scene abides with us almost like a consolation. It is not Shakespeare who speaks, but Sorrow herself : —

> "I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness ;
> I never gave you kingdom, called you children ;
> You owe me no subscription : then let fall
> Your horrible pleasure ; here I stand, your slave,
> A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man : —
> But yet I call you servile ministers,
> That have with two pernicious daughters join'd
> Your high-engender'd battles 'gainst a head
> So old and white as this."

What confidence of simplicity is this! We call it Greek, but it is nature, and cosmopolitan as she. That white head and Priam's — the one feebly defiant, the other bent humbly over the murderous hand of Achilles — are our sufficing epitomes of desolate old age. There is no third. Generally pity for ourselves mingles insensibly with our pity for others, but here — what are we in the awful presence of these unexampled woes? The sorrows of Beaumont and Fletcher's personages have almost as much charm as sadness in them, and we think of the poet more than of the sufferer. Yet his emotion is genuine, and we feel it to be so even while we feel also that it leaves his mind free to think about it, and the dainty expression he will give to it. Beaumont and Fletcher appeal to this self-pity of which I just spoke by having the air of saying, "How would *you* feel in a situation like this?" I am not now speaking of their poetical quality. That is constant and unfailing, especially in Fletcher. In judging them as poets, the question would be, not *what* they said, but *how* they said it.

How early the two poets came to London is uncertain. They had already made Ben Jonson's acquaintance in 1607. Their first joint play, "Philaster, or Love lies a-bleeding," was produced in 1608. I suppose this play is more generally known than any other of theirs, and the characteristic passages have a charm that is perhaps never found less mixed with baser matter in any other of the plays which make up the collec-

tion known as the Works of Beaumont and Fletcher, and they bear the supreme test of being read over again many times without loss of freshness. Philaster is son and heir to a King of Sicily, but robbed of his rights by the King of Calabria. This King has a daughter, Arethusa, seeretly in love with Philaster, as he with her, but destined by her father to marry Pharamond, a Spanish Prince. Euphrasia, daughter of Dion, an honest courtier, is also in love with Philaster, and has entered his service disguised as a page, under the name of Bellario. Arethusa makes her love known to Philaster, who, in order that they may have readier means of communicating with each other, transfers Bellario to her. Thyra, a very odious lady of the court, spreads a report that Arethusa and her handsome page have been too intimate. Philaster believes this slander, and this leads to many complications. Arethusa dismisses Bellario. Philaster refuses to take him back. They all meet in a convenient forest, where Philaster is about to kill Arethusa at her own earnest entreaty, when he is prevented by a clown who is passing. The King, finding his daughter wounded, is furious, and orders instant search for the assassin. Bellario insists that he is the criminal. He and Philaster are put under arrest; the Princess asks to be their jailer. The people rise in insurrection, and rescue him. It then turns out that he and Arethusa have been quietly married. Of course the play turns out with the discovery of Bellario's sex and the King's consent to everything.

I have said that it is hazardous to attempt dividing the work of Beaumont and Fletcher where they worked together. Both, of course, are to blame for what is the great blot on the play, — Philaster's ready belief, I might well say eager belief, in the guilt of the Princess. One of his speeches is positively monstrous in infamous suggestion. Coleridge says: "Beaumont and Fletcher always write as if virtue or goodness were a sort of talisman or strange something that might be lost without the least fault on the part of the owner. In short, their chaste ladies value their chastity as a material thing, not as an act or state of being; and this mere thing being imaginary, no wonder that all their women are represented with the minds of strumpets, except a few irrational humorists. . . . Hence the frightful contrast between their women (even those who are meant to be virtuous) and Shakespeare's." There is some truth in this, but it is extravagant. Beaumont and Fletcher have drawn pure women. Both Bellario and Arethusa are so. So is Aspatia. They had coarse and even animal notions of women, it is true, but we must, in judging what they meant their women to be, never forget that coarseness of phrase is not always coarseness of thought. Women were allowed then to talk about things and to use words now forbidden outside the slums. Decency changes its terms, though not its nature, from one age to another. This is a partial excuse for Beaumont and Fletcher, but they sin against that decorum of the intellect and conscience which is the same in all ages. In

"Women Pleased" Claudio disguises himself, and makes love to his married sister Isabella in order to test her chastity.

The question as to the authorship of "The Two Noble Kinsmen" has an interest perhaps even greater than that concerning the shares of Beaumont and Fletcher respectively in the plays they wrote together, because in this case a part is attributed to Shakespeare. "The Two Noble Kinsmen" was first published in 1634, and ascribed on the title-page to "the memorable worthies of their time, Mr. John F. and Mr. W. S." That Fletcher's name should have been put first is not surprising, if we remember his great popularity. He seems for a time to have been more fashionable than Shakespeare, especially with the young bloods fresh from the University and of the Inns of Court. They appear to have thought that he knew the world, in their limited understanding of the word, better than his great predecessor. The priority of name on the title-page, if not due to this, probably indicated that the greater part of the play was from the hand of Fletcher. Opinion has been divided, with a leaning on the part of the weightier judges towards giving a greater or less share to Shakespeare. I think the verdict must be the Scottish one of "not proven." On the one hand, the play could not have been written earlier than 1608, and it seems extremely improbable that Shakespeare, then at the height of his fame, and in all the splendid maturity of his powers and of his mastery over them, should have become the

junior partner of a younger man. Nor can he be supposed to have made the work over and adapted it to the stage, for he appears to have abandoned that kind of work long before. But we cannot suppose the play to be so early as 1608, for the parts admitted on all hands to be Fletcher's are in his maturer manner. Yet there are some passages which seem to be above his reach, and might lead us to suppose Fletcher to have deliberately imitated Shakespeare's manner; but that he never does, though indebted to him for many suggestions. There is one speech in the play which is certainly very like Shakespeare's in the way it grows, and beginning with a series of noble images, deepens into philosophic thought at the close. And yet I am not altogether convinced, for Fletcher could heighten his style when he thought fit, and when the subject fully inspired him.

Beaumont and Fletcher undoubtedly owed a part of their immediate renown to the fact that they were looked upon as gentlemen and scholars. Not that they put on airs of gentility, as their disciple Ford was fond of doing a little later, and as Horace Walpole, Byron, and even Landor did. They frankly gave their address in Grub Street, so far as we know. But they certainly seem to have been set up, as being artists and men of the world, not perhaps as rivals of Shakespeare, but in favorable comparison with one who was supposed to owe everything to nature. I believe that Pope, in the preface to his edition of Shakespeare, was the first to express doubts about the wisdom

of accepting too literally what Ben Jonson says of his "little Latin and less Greek." However that may be, and I am inclined to think Shakespeare had more learning even, not to say knowledge, than is commonly allowed him, it is singular that the man whose works show him to have meditated deeply on whatever interests human thought, should have been supposed never to have given his mind to the processes of his own craft. But this comparison of him with Beaumont and Fletcher suggests one remark of some interest, namely, that not only are his works by far more cleanly in thought and phrase than those of any of his important contemporaries, except Marlowe, not only are his men more manly and his women more womanly than theirs, but that his types also of gentlemen and ladies are altogether beyond any they seem to have been capable of conceiving.

Of the later dramatists, I think Beaumont and Fletcher rank next to Shakespeare in the amount of pleasure they give, though not in the quality of it, and in fanciful charm of expression. In spite of all their coarseness, there is a delicacy, a sensibility, an air of romance, and above all a grace, in their best work that make them forever attractive to the young, and to all those who have learned to grow old amiably. Imagination, as Shakespeare teaches us to know it, we can hardly allow them, but they are the absolute lords of some of the fairest provinces in the domain of fancy. Their poetry is genuine, spontaneous, and at first hand. As I turn over the leaves of an

edition which I read forty-five years ago, and see, by the passages underscored, how much I enjoyed, and remember with whom, so many happy memories revive, so many vanished faces lean over the volume with me, that I am prone to suspect myself of yielding to an enchantment that is not in the book itself. But no, I read Beaumont and Fletcher through again last autumn, and the eleven volumes of Dyce's edition show even more pencil marks than the two of Darley had gathered in repeated readings. The delight they give, the gayety they inspire, are all their own. Perhaps one cause of this is their lavishness, their lightsome ease, their happy confidence in resources that never failed them. Their minds work without that reluctant break which pains us in most of the later dramatists. They had that pleasure in writing which gives pleasure in reading, and deserve our gratitude because they promote cheerfulness, or, even when gravest, a pensive melancholy that, if it does not play with sadness, never takes it too seriously.

## VI

## MASSINGER AND FORD

Philip Massinger was born in 1584, the son of Arthur Massinger, a gentleman who held some position of trust in the household of Henry, Earl of Pembroke, who married the sister of Sir Philip Sidney. It was for her that the "Arcadia" was written. And for her Ben Jonson wrote the famous epitaph: —

> "Underneath this sable hearse
> Lies the subject of all verse.
> Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother.
> Death! ere thou hast slain another,
> Learn'd and fair and good as she,
> Time shall throw a dart at thee."

It would be pleasant to think that Massinger's boyhood had been spent in the pure atmosphere that would have surrounded such a woman, but it should seem that he could not have been brought up in her household. Otherwise it is hard to understand why, in dedicating his "Bondman" to Philip, Earl of Montgomery, one of her sons, he should say, "However, I could never arrive at the happiness to be made known to your lordship, yet a desire, born with me, to make a tender of all duties and service to the noble family of the Herberts descended to me as an inheritance from my dead father, Arthur Massinger." All that we

know of his early life is that he entered a commoner at St. Alban's Hall, Oxford, in 1602. At the University he remained four years, but left it without taking a degree.

From the year 1606, until his name appears in an undated document which the late Mr. John Payne Collier decides to be not later than 1614, we know nothing of him. This document is so illustrative of the haphazard lives of most of the dramatists and actors of the time as to be worth reading. It was written by Nathaniel Field, the actor who played the part of Bussy d'Ambois in Chapman's play of that name, and who afterwards became prosperous and one of the shareholders in the Globe Theatre. Here it is: —

"*To our most loving friend, Mr. Philip Hinchlow, Esq., These:*

"Mr. Hinchlow, — You understand our unfortunate extremity, and I do not think you so void of Christianity, but you would throw so much money into the Thames as we request now of you rather than endanger so many innocent lives. You know there is XL. more at least to be received of you for the play. We desire you to lend us VL. of that, which shall be allowed to you, without which we cannot be bailed, nor I play any more till this be despatched. It will lose you XXL. ere the end of the next week, besides the hindrance of the next new play. Pray, sir, consider our cases with humanity, and now give us cause to acknowledge you our true friend in time of need. We have entreated Mr. Davison to deliver this note, as well to witness your love as our promises and always acknowledgment to be your most thankful and loving friend, Nat Field."

Under this is written: —

"The money shall be abated out of the money [that] remains for the play of Mr. Fletcher and ours.

ROB DABORNE."

"I have always found you a true loving friend to me, and, in so small a suit, it being honest, I hope you will not fail us. PHILIP MASSINGER."

The endorsement on this appeal shows that Hinchlow sent the money. No doubt Field was selected to write it as the person most necessary to Hinchlow, who could much more easily get along without a new play than without a popular actor. It is plain from the document itself that the signers of it were all under arrest, probably for some tavern bill, or it would not otherwise be easy to account for their being involved in a common calamity. Davison was doubtless released as being the least valuable. It is amusing to see how Hinchlow's humanity and Christianity are briefly appealed to first as a matter of courtesy, and how the real arguments are addressed to his self-interest as more likely to prevail. Massinger's words are of some value as showing that he had probably for some time been connected with the stage.

There are two other allusions to Massinger in the registers of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels. Both are to plays of his now lost. Of one of them even the name has not survived. On the 11th of January, 1631, Sir Henry refused to license this nameless performance "because it did contain dangerous matter — as the deposing of

Sebastian King of Portugal by Philip II., there being peace sworn beween England and Spain." He adds, amusingly enough, "I had my fee notwithstanding, which belongs to me for reading it over, and ought always to be brought with a book." Again, in 1638, at the time of the dispute between Charles I. and his subjects about ship-money, Sir Henry quotes from a manuscript play of Massinger submitted to him for censure the following passage: —

> "Monies? We 'll raise supplies which way we please,
> And force you to subscribe to blanks in which
> We 'll mulct you as we shall think fit. The Cæsars
> In Rome were wise, acknowledging no laws
> But what their swords did ratify, the wives
> And daughters of the senators bowing to
> Their wills as deities," etc.

Sir Henry then adds, "This is a piece taken out of Philip Massinger's play called 'The King and the Subject,' and entered here forever to be remembered by my son and those that cast their eyes upon it, in honor of King Charles, my master, who, reading the play over at Newmarket, set his mark upon the place with his own hand and in these words: 'This is too insolent, and to be changed.' Note that the poet makes it the speech of Don Pedro, King of Spain, and spoken to his subjects." Coleridge rather hastily calls Massinger a democrat. But I find no evidence of it in his plays. He certainly was no advocate of the slavish doctrine of passive obedience, or of what Pope calls the right divine of kings to govern wrong, as Beaumont and Fletcher often were, but

he could not have been a demoerat without being an anachronism, and that no man can be.

The license of the stage at that time went mueh farther than this; nay, it was as great as it ever was at Athens. From a letter of the Privy Council to certain justices of the peace of the County of Middlesex in 1601, we learn that "certain players who use to recite their plays at the Curtain in Moorfields do represent upon the stage in their interludes the persons of some gentlemen of good desert and quality, that are yet alive, under obscure manner, but yet in such sort as all the hearers may take notice both of the matter and the persons that are meant thereby." And again it appears that in 1605 the Corporation of the City of London memorialized the Privy Council, informing them that "Kemp Armyn and other players at the Black Friars have again not forborne to bring upon their stage one or more of the Worshipful Company of Aldermen, to their great scandal and the lessening of their authority," and praying that "order may be taken to remedy the abuse, either by putting down or removing the said Theatre." Aristophanes brought Socrates and Euripides upon the stage, — but neither of these was an Alderman.

Massinger committed no offences of this kind, unless Sir Giles Overreach be meant for some special usurer whom he wished to make hateful, of which there is no evidence. He does indeed express his own opinions, his likes and dislikes, very freely. Nor were these such as he need be

ashamed to avow. It may be inferred, on the strength of some of the sentiments put by him into the mouths of his characters, that he would have sympathized rather with Hampden and Pym than with Charles I. But nothing more than this can be conjectured as to his probable politics. He disliked cruel creditors, grinders of the poor, enclosers of commons, and forestallers, as they were called; for corners in wheat and other commodities were not unknown to our ancestors, nor did they think better of the men that made them than we. There is a curious passage in his play of "The Guardian" which shows that his way of thinking on some points was not unlike Mr. Ruskin's. Severino, who has been outlawed, draws up a code of laws for the banditti of whom he has become captain, defining who might be properly plundered and who not. Among those belonging to the former class he places the

> "Builders of iron-mills that grub up forests
> With timber trees for shipping;"

and in the latter, scholars, soldiers, rack-rented farmers, needy market folks, sweaty laborers, carriers, and women. All that we can fairly say is that he was a man of large and humane sympathies.

But though Massinger did not, so far as we know, indulge in as great licenses of scenic satire as some of his contemporaries, there is in his "Roman Actor" so spirited a defence of the freedom of the stage and of its usefulness as a guar-

dian and reformer of morals that I will quote it: —

"*Aretinus.* Are you on the stage,
You talk so boldly?
*Paris.* The whole world being one,
This place is not exempted; and I am
So confident in the justice of our cause
That I could wish Cæsar, in whose great name
All kings are comprehended, sat as judge
To hear our plea, and then determine of us.
If, to express a man sold to his lusts,
Wasting the treasure of his time and fortunes
In wanton dalliance, and to what sad end
A wretch that 's so given over does arrive at;
Deterring careless youth, by his example,
From such licentious courses; laying open
The snares of bawds, and the consuming arts
Of prodigal strumpets, can deserve reproof,
Why are not all your golden principles,
Writ down by grave philosophers to instruct us
To choose fair virtue for our guide, not pleasure,
Condemned unto the fire?
*Sura.* There 's spirit in this.
*Paris.* Or if desire of honor was the base
On which the building of the Roman Empire
Was raised up to this height; if, to inflame
The noble youth with an ambitious heat
T' endure the frosts of danger, nay, of death,
To be thought worthy the triumphal wreath
By glorious undertakings, may deserve
Reward or favor from the commonwealth,
Actors may put in for as large a share
As all the sects of the philosophers.
They with cold precepts (perhaps seldom read)
Deliver what an honorable thing
The active virtue is; but does that fire
The blood, or swell the veins with emulation
To be both good and great, equal to that
Which is presented on our theatres?
Let a good actor, in a lofty scene,
Shew great Alcides honour'd in the sweat

Of his twelve labours; or a bold Camillus
Forbidding Rome to be redeem'd with gold
From the insulting Gauls; or Scipio,
After his victories, imposing tribute
On conquer'd Carthage; if done to the life,
As if they saw their dangers, and their glories,
And did partake with them in their rewards,
All that have any spark of Roman in them,
The slothful arts laid by, contend to be
Like those they see presented.
*Rusticus.* He has put
The consuls to their whisper.
*Paris.* But 't is urged
That we corrupt youth, and traduce superiors.
When do we bring a vice upon the stage
That does go off unpunish'd? Do we teach,
By the success of wicked undertakings,
Others to tread in their forbidden steps?
We shew no arts of Lydian panderism,
Corinthian poisons, Persian flatteries,
But mulcted so in the conclusion, that
Even those spectators that were so inclined,
Go home changed men. And, for traducing such
That are above us, publishing to the world
Their secret crimes, we are as innocent
As such as are born dumb. When we present
An heir that does conspire against the life
Of his dear parent, numbering every hour
He lives as tedious to him, if there be
Among the auditors one whose conscience tells him
He is of the same mould, — WE CANNOT HELP IT.
Or, bringing on the stage a loose adulteress,
That does maintain the riotous expense
Of him that feeds her greedy lust, yet suffers
The lawful pledges of a former bed
To starve the while for hunger; if a matron,
However great in fortune, birth, or titles,
Guilty of such a foul, unnatural sin,
Cry out, 'T is writ for me, — WE CANNOT HELP IT.
Or, when a covetous man 's express'd, whose wealth
Arithmetic cannot number, and whose lordships

A falcon in one day cannot fly over,
Yet he so sordid in his mind, so griping,
As not to afford himself the necessaries
To maintain life; if a patrician
(Though honour'd with a consulship) find himself
Touch'd to the quick in this, — WE CANNOT HELP IT.
Or, when we show a judge that is corrupt,
And will give up his sentence as he favours
The person, not the cause, saving the guilty,
If of his faction, and as oft condemning
The innocent, out of particular spleen;
If any in this reverend assembly,
Nay, even yourself, my lord, that are the image
Of absent Cæsar, feel something in your bosom
That puts you in remembrance of things past,
Or things intended, — 'T IS NOT IN US TO HELP IT.
I have said, my lord: and now, as you find cause,
Or censure us, or free us with applause."

We know nothing else of Massinger's personal history beyond what has been told, except that the parish register of St. Saviour's contains this entry: "March 20, 1639–40, buried Philip Massinger, a stranger." A pathos has been felt by some in the words "a stranger," as if they implied poverty and desertion. But they merely meant that Massinger did not belong to that parish. John Aubrey is spoken of in the same way in the register of St. Mary Magdalen at Oxford, and for the same reason.

Massinger wrote thirty-seven plays, of which only eighteen have come down to us. The name of one of these non-extant plays, "The Noble Choice," gives a keen pang to a lover of the poet, for it seems to indicate a subject peculiarly fitted to bring out his best qualities as a dramatist.

Four of the lost plays were used to kindle fires by that servant of Mr. Warburton who made such tragic havoc in our earlier dramatic literature, a vulgar Omar without the pious motive of the Commander of the Faithful, if, as is very doubtful, he did indeed order the burning of the Alexandrian Library.

To me Massinger is one of the most interesting as well as one of the most delightful of the old dramatists, not so much for his passion or power, though at times he reaches both, as for the love he shows for those things that are lovely and of good report in human nature, for his sympathy with what is generous and high-minded and honorable, and for his equable flow of a good every-day kind of poetry with few rapids or cataracts, but singularly soothing and companionable. The Latin adjective for gentleman, *generosus*, fits him aptly. His plots are generally excellent; his versification masterly, with skilful breaks and pauses, capable of every needful variety of emotion; and his dialogue easy, natural, and sprightly, subsiding in the proper places to a refreshing conversational tone. This graceful art was one seldom learned by any of those who may be fairly put in comparison with him. Even when it has put on the sock, their blank verse cannot forget the stride and strut it had caught of the cothurnus. Massinger never mouths or rants, because he seems never to have written merely to fill up an empty space. He is therefore never bombastic, for bombast gets its metaphorical name from its original physical use

as padding. Indeed, there are very few empty spaces in his works. His plays are interesting alike from their story and the way it is told. I doubt if there are so many salient short passages, striking images, or pregnant sayings to be found in his works as may be found in those of very inferior men. But we feel always that we are in the company of a serious and thoughtful man, if not in that of a great thinker. Great thinkers, indeed, are seldom so entertaining as he. If he does not tax the mind of his reader, nor call out all its forces with profound problems of psychology, he is infinitely suggestive of not unprofitable reflection, and of agreeable nor altogether purposeless meditation. His is "a world whose course is equable," where "calm pleasures abide," if no "majestic pains." I never could understand Lamb's putting Middleton and Rowley above him, unless, perhaps, because he was less at home on the humbler levels of humanity, less genial than they, or, at least, than Rowley. But there were no proper æsthetic grounds of comparison, if I am right in thinking, as I do, that he differed from them in kind, and that his kind was the higher.

In quoting from Wordsworth's "Laodamia" just now, I stopped short of the word "pure," and said only that Massinger's world was "equable." I did this because in some of his lower characters there is a coarseness, nay, a foulness, of thought and sometimes of phrase for which I find it hard to account. There is nothing in it that could possibly corrupt the imagination, for it is altogether

repulsive. In this case, as in Chapman's, I should say that it indicated more ignorance of what is debasingly called Life than knowledge of it. With all this he gives frequent evidence of a higher conception of love than was then common. The region in which his mind seems most naturally to dwell is one of honor, courage, devotion, and ethereal sentiment.

I cannot help asking myself, did such a world ever exist? Perhaps not; yet one is inclined to say that it is such a world as might exist, and, if possible, ought to exist. It is a world of noble purpose not always inadequately fulfilled; a world whose terms are easily accepted by the intellect as well as by the imagination. By this I mean that there is nothing violently improbable in it. Some men, and, I believe, more women, live habitually in such a world when they commune with their own minds. It is a world which we visit in thought as we go abroad to renew and invigorate the ideal part of us. The canopy of its heaven is wide enough to stretch over Boston also. I heard, the other day, the story of a Boston merchant which convinces me of it. The late Mr. Samuel Appleton was anxious about a ship of his which was overdue, and was not insured. Every day added to his anxiety, till at last he began to be more troubled about that than about his ship. "Is it possible," he said to himself, "that I am getting to love money for itself, and not for its noble uses?" He added together the value of the ship and the estimated profit on her cargo, found it to

be $40,000, and at once devoted that amount to charities in which he was interested. This kind of thing *may* happen, and sometimes *does* happen, in the actual world; it *always* happens in the world where Massinger lays his scene. That is the difference, and it is by reason of this difference that I like to be there. I move more freely and breathe more inspiring air among those encouraging possibilities. As I just said, we find no difficulty in reconciling ourselves with its conditions. We find no difficulty even where there is an absolute disengagement from all responsibility to the matter-of-fact, as in the "Arabian Nights," which I read through again a few years ago with as much pleasure as when a boy, perhaps with more. For it appears to me that it is the business of all imaginative literature to offer us a sanctuary from the world of the newspapers, in which we have to live, whether we will or no. As in looking at a picture we must place ourselves at the proper distance to harmonize all its particulars into an effective whole, I am not sure that life is not seen in a truer perspective when it is seen in the fairer prospect of an ideal remoteness. Perhaps we must always go a little way back in order to get into the land of romance, as Scott and Hawthorne did. And yet it is within us too. An unskilful story-teller always raises our suspicion by putting a foot-note to any improbable occurrence, to say "This is a fact," and the so-called realist raises doubts in my mind when he assures me that he, and he alone, gives me the facts of life. Too

often all I can say is, if these are the facts, I don't want them. The police reports give me more than I care for every day. But are they the facts? I had much rather believe them to be the accidental and transitory phenomena of our existence here. The real and abiding facts are those that are recognized as such by the soul when it is in that upper chamber of our being which is farthest removed from the senses, and commerces with its truer self. I very much prefer "King Lear" to Balzac's bourgeois version of it in "Le Père Goriot," as I do the *naïveté* of Miranda to that of Voltaire's Ingénu, and, when I look about me in the Fortunate Islands of the poet, would fain exclaim with her:

> "O! wonder!
> How many goodly creatures are there here!
> How beauteous mankind is! O, brave new world,
> That has such people in 't!"

Those old poets had a very lordly contempt for probability when improbability would serve their purpose better. But Massinger taxes our credulity less than most of them, for his improbabilities are never moral; that is, are never impossibilities. I do not recall any of those sudden conversions in his works from baseness to loftiness of mind, and from vice to virtue, which trip up all our expectations so startlingly in many an old play. As to what may be called material improbabilities, we should remember that two hundred and fifty years ago many things were possible, with great advantage to complication of plot, which are no longer so. The hand of an absolute prince could give

a very sudden impulse to the wheel of Fortune, whether to lift a minion from the dust or hurl him back again; men might be taken by Barbary corsairs and sold for slaves, or turn Turks, as occasion required. The world was fuller of chances and changes than now, and the boundaries of the possible, if not of the probable, far wider. Massinger was discreet in the use of these privileges, and does not abuse them, as his contemporaries and predecessors so often do. His is a possible world, though it be in some ways the best of all possible worlds. He puts no strain upon our imaginations.

As a poet he is inferior to many others, and this follows inevitably from the admission we feel bound to make that good sense and good feeling are his leading qualities — yet ready to forget their sobriety in the exhilaration of romantic feeling. When Nature makes a poet, she seems willing to sacrifice all other considerations. Yet this very good sense of Massinger's has made him excellent as a dramatist. His "New Way to pay Old Debts" is a very effective play, though in the reading far less interesting and pleasing than most of the others. Yet there are power and passion in it, even if the power be somewhat melodramatic, and the passion of an ignoble type. In one respect he was truly a poet — his conceptions of character were ideal; but his diction, though full of dignity and never commonplace, lacks the charm of the inspired and inspiring word, the relief of the picturesque image that comes so natu-

rally to the help of Fletcher. Where he is most fanciful, indeed, the influence of Fletcher is only too apparent both in his thought and diction. I should praise him chiefly for the atmosphere of magnanimity which invests his finer scenes, and which it is wholesome to breathe. In Massinger's plays people behave generously, as if that were the natural thing to do, and give us a comfortable feeling that the world is not so bad a place, after all, and that perhaps Schopenhauer was right in enduring for seventy-two years a life that was n't worth living. He impresses one as a manly kind of person, and the amount of man in a poet, though it may not add to his purely poetical quality, adds much, I think, to our pleasure in reading his works.

I have left myself little space in which to speak of Ford, but it will suffice. In reading him again after a long interval, with elements of wider comparison, and provided with more trustworthy tests, I find that the greater part of what I once took on trust as precious is really paste and pinchbeck. His plays seem to me now to be chiefly remarkable for that filigree-work of sentiment which we call sentimentality. The word "alchemy" once had a double meaning. It was used to signify both the process by which lead could be transmuted into gold, and the alloy of baser metal by which gold could be adulterated without losing so much of its specious semblance as to be readily detected. The ring of the true metal can be partially imi-

tated, and for a while its glow, but the counterfeit grows duller as the genuine grows brighter with wear. The greater poets have found out the ennobling secret, the lesser ones the trick of falsification. Ford seems to me to have been a master in it. He abounds especially in mock pathos. I remember when he thoroughly imposed on me. A youth, unacquainted with grief and its incommunicable reserve, sees nothing unnatural or indecent in those expansive sorrows precious only because they can be confided to the first comer, and finds a pleasing titillation in the fresh-water tears with which they cool his eyelids. But having once come to know the jealous secretiveness of real sorrow, we resent these conspiracies to waylay our sympathy, — conspiracies of the opera plotted at the top of the lungs. It is joy that is wont to overflow, but grief shrinks back to its sources. I suspect the anguish that confides its loss to the town-crier. Even in that single play of Ford's which comes nearest to the true pathetic, "The Broken Heart," there is too much apparent artifice, and Charles Lamb's comment on its closing scene is worth more than all Ford ever wrote. But a critic must look at it *minus* Charles Lamb. We may read as much of ourselves into a great poet as we will; we shall never cancel our debt to him. In the interests of true literature we should not honor fraudulent drafts upon our imagination.

Ford has an air of saying something without ever saying it that is peculiarly distressing to a man who values his time. His diction is hack-

neyed and commonplace, and has seldom the charm of unexpected felicity, so much a matter of course with the elder poets. Especially does his want of imagination show itself in his metaphors. The strong direct thrust of phrase which we cannot parry, sometimes because of very artlessness, is never his.

Compare, for example, this passage with one of similar content from Shakespeare: —

> "Keep in,
> Bright angel, that severer breath to cool
> The heat of cruelty which sways the temple
> Of your too stony breast; you cannot urge
> One reason to rebuke my trembling plea
> Which I have not, with many nights' expense,
> Examined; but, oh Madam, still I find
> No physic strong to cure a tortured mind
> But freedom from the torture it sustains."

Now hear Shakespeare: —

> "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
> Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
> And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
> Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of the perilous stuff
> Which weighs upon the heart?"

Ford lingers-out his heart-breaks too much. He recalls to my mind a speech of Calianax in Beaumont and Fletcher's "Maid's Tragedy:" "You have all fine new tricks to grieve. But I ne'er knew any but direct crying." One is tempted to prefer the peremptory way in which the old ballad-mongers dealt with such matters: —

> "She turned her face unto the wa',
> And there her very heart it brak."

I cannot bid you farewell without thanking you for the patience with which you have followed me to the end. I may have seemed sometimes to be talking to you of things that would weigh but as thistle-down in the great business-scales of life. But I have an old opinion, strengthening with years, that it is as important to keep the soul alive as the body: nay, that it is the life of the soul which gives all its value to that of the body. Poetry is a criticism of life only in the sense that it furnishes us with the standard of a more ideal felicity, of calmer pleasures and more majestic pains. I am glad to see that what the understanding would stigmatize as useless is coming back into books written for children, which at one time threatened to become more and more drearily practical and didactic. The fairies are permitted once more to imprint their rings on the tender sward of the child's fancy, and it is the child's fancy that often lives obscurely on to minister solace to the lonelier and less sociable mind of the man. Our nature resents the closing up of the windows on its emotional and imaginative side, and revenges itself as it can. I have observed that many who deny the inspiration of Scripture hasten to redress their balance by giving a reverent credit to the revelations of inspired tables and camp-stools. In a last analysis it may be said that it is to the sense of Wonder that all literature of the Fancy and of the Imagination appeals. I am told that this sense is the survival in us of some savage ancestor of the

age of flint. If so, I am thankful to him for his longevity, or his transmitted nature, whichever it may be. But I have my own suspicion sometimes that the true age of flint is before, and not behind us, an age hardening itself more and more to those subtle influences which ransom our lives from the captivity of the actual, from that dungeon whose warder is the Giant Despair. Yet I am consoled by thinking that the siege of Troy will be remembered when those of Vicksburg and Paris are forgotten. One of the old dramatists, Thomas Heywood, has, without meaning it, set down for us the uses of the poets: —

> "They cover us with counsel to defend us
> From storms without; they polish us within
> With learning, knowledge, arts, and disciplines;
> All that is nought and vicious they sweep from us
> Like dust and cobwebs; our rooms concealed
> Hang with the costliest hangings 'bout the walls,
> Emblems and beauteous symbols pictured round."

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